HRILLING

Wonder STORIES

IENCE FICTION BY TOP WRITERS

FEATURING

WHISTLE STOP IN SPACE
by Kendell Foster Crossen

BOOBY PRIZE
by George O. Smith

AUG. 25c

HRILLING
LICATION

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LOOSE FALSE TEETH?

The makers of POLIDENT offer you Double Your Money Back unless this

Amazing New CREAM Holds Plates Tighter, Longer THAN ANYTHING YOU EVER TRIED

POLI-GRIP

Double Your Money Back Unless it Gives Y[illegible] the organi[illegible]

MORE COMFORT, MORE SECURITY THAN YOU EVER HAD BEFORE

Yes, the people who make Polident, the world's largest selling denture cleanser, are standing right behind their new adhesive cream, Poli-Grip, with an ironclad guarantee. You get double your money back, if Poli-Grip doesn't hold your plates tighter, longer than anything you've ever tried.

And that's not all. See if you don't find that Poli-Grip does all these wonderful things for you, too:

1. . . . form a cushion between your plate and gums to eliminate the friction that makes gums sore and raw.
2. . . . hold shallow lowers, despite lack of suction.
3. . . . seal the edges of plates so food particles can't get underneath to cause irritation.
4. . . . enable you to eat hard-to-chew foods in comfort, like steak, apples, celery, even corn-on-the-cob.
5. . . . give you full confidence to laugh, talk, sing without fear of embarrassment due to slipping plates.
6. hold plates tight even during strenuous sessions of coughing or sneezing.

Won't life be wonderful with all these torments behind you? Be sure to be among the first to learn the glorious comfort of holding loose false teeth tight and snug with Poli-Grip! Buy a tube at your drugstore as soon as possible.

Many tried powders, found they failed!

Read what they say about this new way:

"For ten years my teeth wouldn't stay tight for more than two hours a day. I tried powders, but nothing worked till your new *cream*, Poli-Grip, came along."
Mrs. T. W., Medfield, Mass.

"I like the cool taste of Poli-Grip and the smooth way it holds my teeth. It is easy to apply and holds tight for so long."
Mrs. L. W. N., Ottumwa, Iowa

"I found your new cream, Poli-Grip, very pleasant and mild-tasting and it held my loose plates very tight, longer than anything I've tried."
Mrs. H. D. M., Beadentown, Florida

"I like the wonderful holding strength of your new *cream* better than anything I've ever used. I like Poli-Grip's refreshing taste, too."
H. B. V., East Canaan, Conn.

"I definitely prefer Poli-Grip to other products I've tried. It holds my plate tighter and feels comfortable longer. Poli-Grip is cooling, soothing, never gritty."
Mrs. K. L., Los Angeles, Calif.

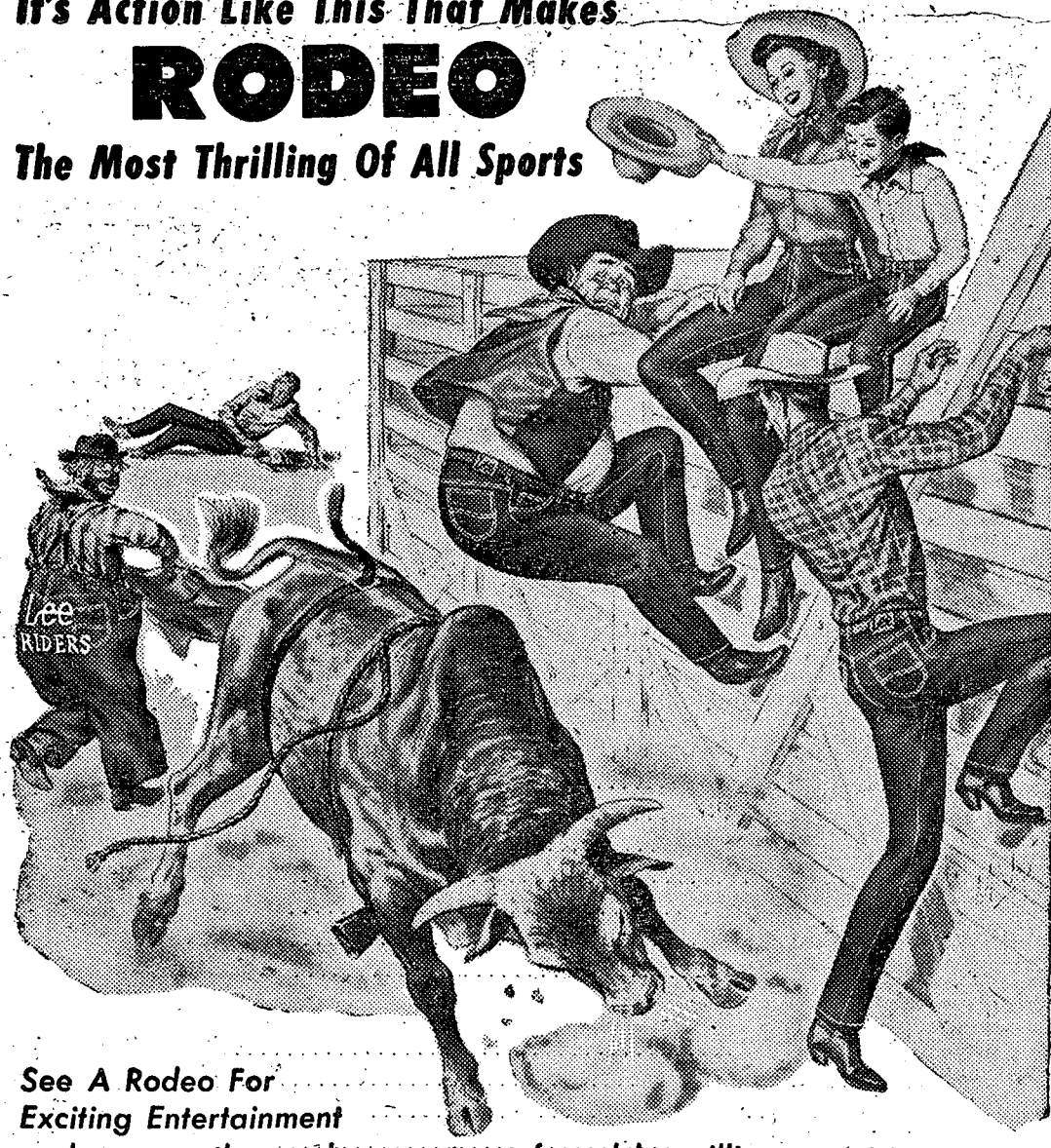
Made and GUARANTEED by the makers of POLIDENT

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It's Action Like This That Makes

RODEO

The Most Thrilling Of All Sports



See A Rodeo For Exciting Entertainment and . . wear the cowboy pants preferred by millions coast-to-coast

Lee RIDERS

Lee Riders, Snug-Fitting in True Western Style . . . Lee 11-Oz. Cowboy Pant Denim . . . Ladies' and Boys' sizes of 8-Oz. Denim . . . U-Shaped Saddle Crotch for Comfort . . . SANFORIZED for Permanent Fit . . . Buy Your Correct Size . . . Complete Size Ranges for Men, Ladies and Boys

GUARANTEED: A new pair free or your money back if Lee Riders do not look better, fit better and wear longer than any you've ever worn!

Lee ← None Genuine Without This Branded Cowhide Label

THE H. D. LEE COMPANY

San Francisco, Cal.—Kansas City, Mo.—Minneapolis, Minn.
South Bend, Ind.—Trenton, N. J.—Boaz, Ala.—Dallas, Texas

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THRILLING
wonder STORIES

VOL. XLII, NO. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION AUGUST, 1953

FEATURED NOVEL

WHISTLE STOP IN SPACE ..... Kendell Foster Crossen 10
When the Secretary of Planets picked him as the dove of peace, Manning Draco found you can't have your chaos and eat it, too!

TWO NOVELETS

BOOBY PRIZE ..... George O. Smith 72
He knew he wouldn't have much to offer Norma unless his matter transmitter worked—but the only matter she cared about was matrimony

ARBITER ..... Sam Merwin, Jr. 104
Out in space, out in the silence and darkness between worlds, where the hours drag so slowly, there's always enough time for murder. . . .

SHORT STORIES

FISHING SEASON ..... Robert Sheckley 45
SIBLING ..... Leslie Waltham 54
THE BELLY OF GOR JEETL ..... Charles A. Stearns 61
METAMORPHOSIS ..... Mike Curry 94
THE POLITICIAN ..... R. J. McGregor 99
GREEN-EYED MONSTER ..... J. W. Groves 121
FLIGHT EIGHTEEN ..... Paul A. Torak 128

FEATURES

THE READER SPEAKS ..... The Editor 6
WHAT'S NEW IN SCIENCE? ..... Dixon Wells 9
PROGRESS (Verse) ..... Alexander Samalman 33
ARE YOU HEAVEN WISE? ..... A Quiz 69
TOP OF THE WORLD ..... I. G. Edmonds 70
WAR OF THE WORLDS (Movie Review) ..... Pat Jones 92
SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW ..... A Department 145

Cover Painting by JACK COGGINS

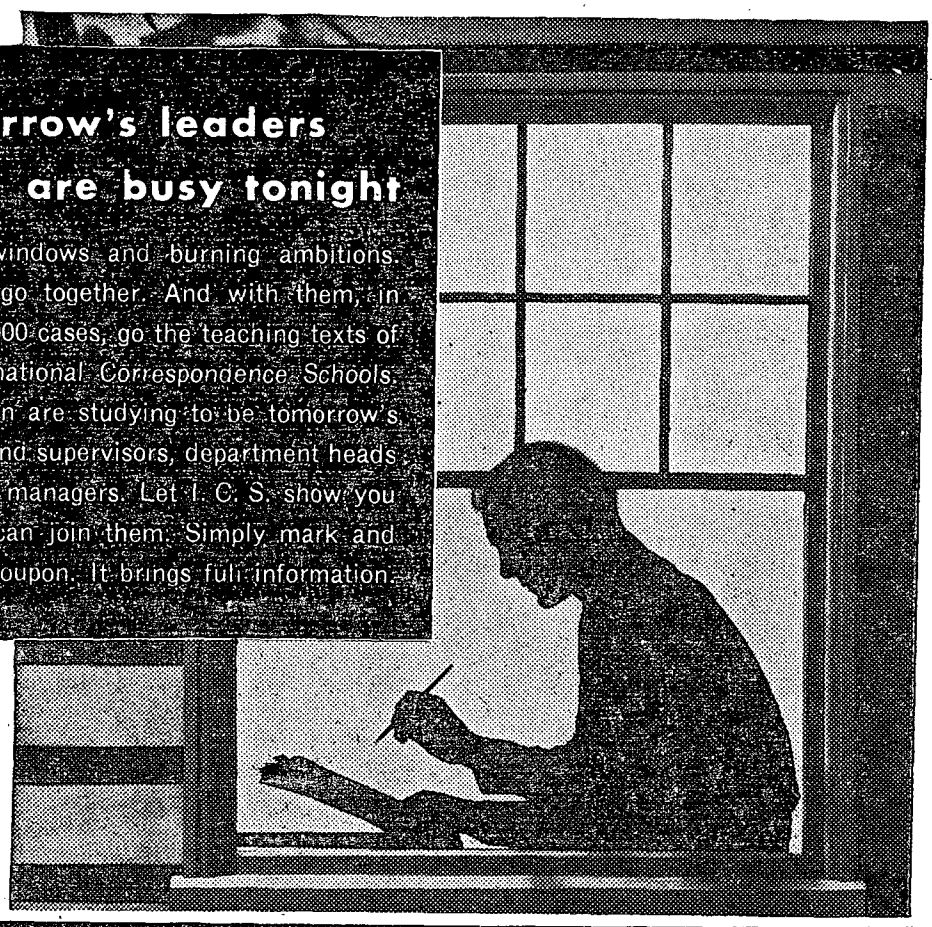
N. L. PINES, *Publisher*
EDWARD R. ROFHEART, *Art Director*
FANNY ELLSWORTH, *Managing Editor*
SAMUEL MINES, *Editor*

THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Published every other month by STANDARD MAGAZINES, INC., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Copyright, 1953, by Standard Magazines, Inc. Subscription (12 issues), $3.00; single copies, 25c. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Re-entered as second-class matter October 8, 1946, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of March 3, 1879. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication please include your postal zone number, if any. August, 1953. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tomorrow's leaders are busy tonight

Lighted windows and burning ambitions. The two go together. And with them, in over 100,000 cases, go the teaching texts of the International Correspondence Schools. These men are studying to be tomorrow's foremen and supervisors, department heads and office managers. Let I. C. S. show you how you can join them. Simply mark and mail the coupon. It brings full information.



INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

ICS

BOX 3970, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, send me "HOW to SUCCEED" and the booklet about *the course BEFORE which I have marked X:*

ART
- ☐ Commercial Art
- ☐ Magazine and Book Illustrating
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Fashion Illustrating

AUTOMOTIVE
- ☐ Automobile, Mechanic
- ☐ Auto-Elec. Technician
- ☐ Auto Body Rebuilding and Refinishing
- ☐ Diesel—Gas Engines

AVIATION
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineering Jr.
- ☐ Aircraft Engine Mechanic
- ☐ *Airplane Drafting*

BUILDING
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Arch. Drafting
- ☐ *Building Contractor*
- ☐ Estimating
- ☐ Carpenter and Mill Work
- ☐ Carpenter Foreman
- ☐ Reading Blueprints
- ☐ House Planning
- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Heating
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Electrician

BUSINESS
- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Certified Public Accountant
- ☐ Accounting
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Personnel and Labor Relations
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Retail Business Management
- ☐ Managing Small Business
- ☐ Sales Management
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Traffic Management

CHEMISTRY
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry
- ☐ Analytical Chemistry
- ☐ Petroleum—Nat'l Gas
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making
- ☐ Plastics

CIVIL, STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ *Structural Engineering*
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Reading Blueprints
- ☐ Concrete Construction
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering

DRAFTING
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Sheet Metal Drafting
- ☐ Mine Surveying and Drafting

ELECTRICAL
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ *Electrician*
- ☐ Electrical Maintenance
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electric Power and Light
- ☐ *Lineman*

HIGH SCHOOL
- ☐ High School Subjects

- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ *Good English*

MECHANICAL AND SHOP
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Supervision
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Machine Design-Drafting
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Tool Design
- ☐ Industrial Instrumentation
- ☐ Machine Shop Inspection
- ☐ Reading Blueprints
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Gas—Electric Welding
- ☐ Heat Treatment—Metallurgy
- ☐ Sheet Metal Work
- ☐ Sheet Metal Pattern Drafting
- ☐ Refrigeration

POWER
- ☐ *Combustion Engineering*
- ☐ Diesel—Electric
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Stationary Steam Engineering
- ☐ Stationary Fireman

RADIO, TELEVISION, COMMUNICATIONS
- ☐ General Radio
- ☐ Radio Operation
- ☐ Radio Servicing—FM
- ☐ *Television*
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Telephone Work

RAILROAD
- ☐ *Locomotive Engineer*
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Air Brakes ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Railroad Administration

TEXTILE
- ☐ Textile Engineering
- ☐ Cotton Manufacture
- ☐ Rayon Manufacture
- ☐ Woolen Manufacture
- ☐ Loom Fixing
- ☐ Finishing and Dyeing
- ☐ Textile Designing

YEAR OF THE SIX MILLIONTH STUDENT

Name_____ Age_____ Home Address_____

City_____ Zone_____ State_____ Working Hours_____ A.M. to_____ P.M.

Occupation_____

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

THROUGH the many voices of science fiction runs the old refrain that it is a literature of prophecy. This is a description which leaves us, editorially and personally, cold. There is a considerable gap between prophecy and speculation—and speculation is what science fiction represents much more than prophecy.

Genuine prophecy, if there be such a thing, is born either of inspiration or of empirical research. If inspiration, it may also be fiction. If research, it should avoid fiction.

A science-fiction writer, on the other hand, has advantages over both prophet and scientist. He can extend his reasoning in any direction and for any distance he chooses. The fact that he admits beforehand his speculations are fiction permits him a freedom of imagination which the prophet is forbidden. For even if the prophet is really indulging in fantasy he is trying to conceal that fact.

Speculation appeals to us more than does prophecy. There is a life-or-death grimness about a prophet—a lack of humor—a smell of brimstone and damnation which is absent from the casual atmosphere of a speculative excursion.

Science fiction's greatest contribution, it seems to us, is its emphasis on the importance of change. The theme of practically all science fiction stories is one of change—of things which may be, or might have been. To the extent that it educates people to think in terms of change it is a constructive force. To the extent that it demolishes old patterns encrusted with age and habit, that it jolts any individual out of a well-worn rut, it is performing a service.

The concept of change goes further than the mere mechanical appurtenances of our civilization. *Autre temps, autre mores.* People change too; their attitudes toward each other change, their values change, their moral criteria change. You might coin a cliché by saying that change itself is the one factor which doesn't change.

One of the tests of good writing is the way it stands up under the aging process. And the quality which makes a piece of writing still valid after hundreds of years is the universality of its approach to human problems. Though the problems may change, the emotional response may retain its essential nature. Listen to Nathaniel Hawthorne, writing a hundred years ago:

No summer ever came back and no two summers were ever alike. Times change and people change and if our hearts do not change as readily, so much the worse for us.

This was Nathaniel Hawthorne, writing a hundred years ago.

Point? The point is that science fiction may as well concern itself with the change in people as with the change in machines. For although the change in our external lives has already begun, we lag behind in our personal attitudes. This is to be expected, since society has enormous inertia and requires a major cataclysm to force a social change. The cataclysms are practically guaranteed—let's just hope man is still around to make his adjustments.

Letters From Our Readers

HE'S GOT TROUBLES

by Benny L. Fitzgerald

Dear Sirs: I have a problem. Too many plots and no stories. You see, I have very little trouble thinking up plots, but all kinds of trouble trying to write a story to sell. For a long time now I have tried to write short stories as a hobby, but they never get anywhere. So, I would like to get in

(Continued on page 133)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others?

Today it is known that they discovered and learned to interpret certain *Secret Methods* for the development of their inner power of mind. They learned to command the inner forces within their own beings, and to master life. This secret art of living has been preserved and handed down throughout the ages. Today it is extended to those who dare to use its profound principles to meet and solve the problems of life in these complex times.

AMENHOTEP IV
Founder of Egypt's
Mystery Schools

This Sealed Book—FREE

Has life brought you that personal satisfaction, the sense of achievement and happiness that you desire? If not, it is your duty to yourself to learn about this rational method of applying natural laws for the mastery of life. To the thoughtful person it is obvious that everyone cannot be entrusted with an intimate knowledge of the mysteries of life, for everyone is not capable of properly using it. But if you are one of those possessed of a true desire to forge ahead and wish to make use of the subtle influences of life, the Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) will send you A Sealed Book of explanation without obligation. This Sealed Book tells how you, in the privacy of your own home, without interference with your personal affairs or manner of living, may receive these secret teachings. Not weird or strange practices, but a rational application of the basic laws of life. Use the coupon, and obtain your complimentary copy.

Use this coupon for **FREE** *copy of book*

SCRIBE V.V.S.
The Rosicrucians (AMORC)
San Jose, California

Please send free copy of Sealed Book which I shall read as directed.

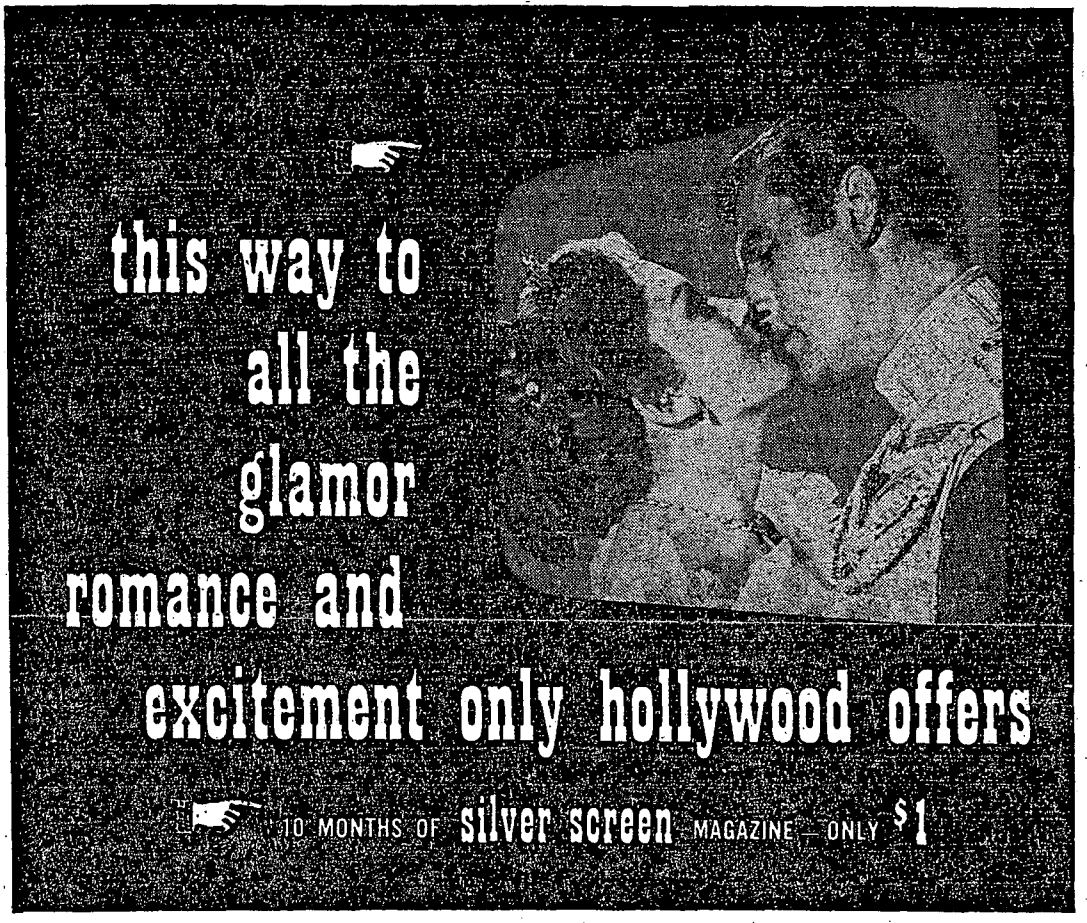
NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....

The ROSICRUCIANS
SAN JOSE (AMORC) CALIFORNIA

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



In every issue of SILVER SCREEN you will thrill to the behind-the-scenes gossip, the premieres, the parties, the fabulous stories that make Hollywood the world's most exciting town. And you'll enjoy the beauty, fashion, and figure secrets of stars and starlets...the latest disc data...film reviews ...true-to-life pin-ups...and much, much MORE.

act now — *and get the next 10 months of SILVER SCREEN for only $1 — one third under the regular price. Mail the coupon today.*

TW-2

SILVER SCREEN, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

Yes! I want to take advantage of SILVER SCREEN's Special Offer — 10 months for only $1.00. Here's my dollar.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....ZONE.....STATE.....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What's New in Science?

COLOSSAL AMOUNTS OF ENERGY from the destruction of matter, instead of mere fission, are suggested by Dr. I. I. Rabi, Columbia University physicist and Nobel prize winner. Discovery of a particle of anti-matter, or the negative analogue of the proton is theorized by Dr. Rabi. Combining a single particle of anti-matter with a proton would release two billion electron volts of energy.

TOO HIGH A GOAL MAY INDUCE FAILURE, psychologists have concluded, by creating anxieties which reduce the individual's efficiency. A modest goal may, on the other hand, lead the individual to outdo himself because the lack of strain enables him to perform at his best.

LOSS OF ADULT TEETH is permanent, but three California scientists, Dr. Louis Baume, Dr. Herbert Evans and Dr. Hermann Becks are on the track of the hormones which make teeth grow. The pituary gland is involved—its hormones makes teeth develop, but thyroxin from the thyroid gland is needed before the teeth will break through the gums. While it is still very much science fiction, it is not out of the bounds of probability that man will some day discover the way to regrow lost teeth.

FOR PARENTS ONLY: Do you scream at your kids? Or do you go into a dignified silence when they are horrid? The National Hospital for Speech Disorders thinks the deep silence may be worse for their dear little egos than a real screaming brawl. Giving them the silence treatment is bullying them just as much as a show of force or noise. They suggest that withdrawing a coveted privilege is a much more civilized method of dealing with recalcitrance and makes the child see that he must be part of a mutual society. (NOTE: we've tried that withdrawal of privileges for ten years and it doesn't work worth a hoot. Let us know how *you* make out.)

ARE YOU THE ULCER TYPE? Think twice before you accept that promotion into a worry-type job. The extra dough isn't worth the pain. Doctors now suggest that employers have a conference with doctors and employee before promoting employee into any position where strain and anxiety will play a part. If he is the ulcer type he is better off elsewhere.

YOU CAN RENT AN ELECTRONIC BRAIN for $11,900 a month if you have some heavy problems coming up. Just the thing for the year-end college math exams.

THERE IS AN ATMOSPHERE ON THE MOON after all, concludes Dr. Harlow Shapley of Harvard Observatory. It is composed largely of argon formed from the potassium isotopes in the lunar rocks and it is pretty thin. Not exactly the correct formula for a summer resort. But it's there.

A $200,000 GRANT to study the causes of marriage failure has just been made to a research organization in New York. The original early study showed ten possible causes for broken marriages, all of which seemed to revolve around personality troubles, or what was termed "excessive emotional needs."

THINK FLYING SAUCERS ARE NEW? The prophet Ezekiel mentions them in the Bible. In 1882 a huge flying saucer was observed and recorded by a number of reputable scientists and in 1897 there was a veritable plague of the things as there is now. Dr. Menzel's new book FLYING SAUCERS examines all the probabilities from Ezekiel down to modern times and is inclined to consider them natural phenomena such as ice crystals, auroras or similar displays. —*Dixon Wells*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

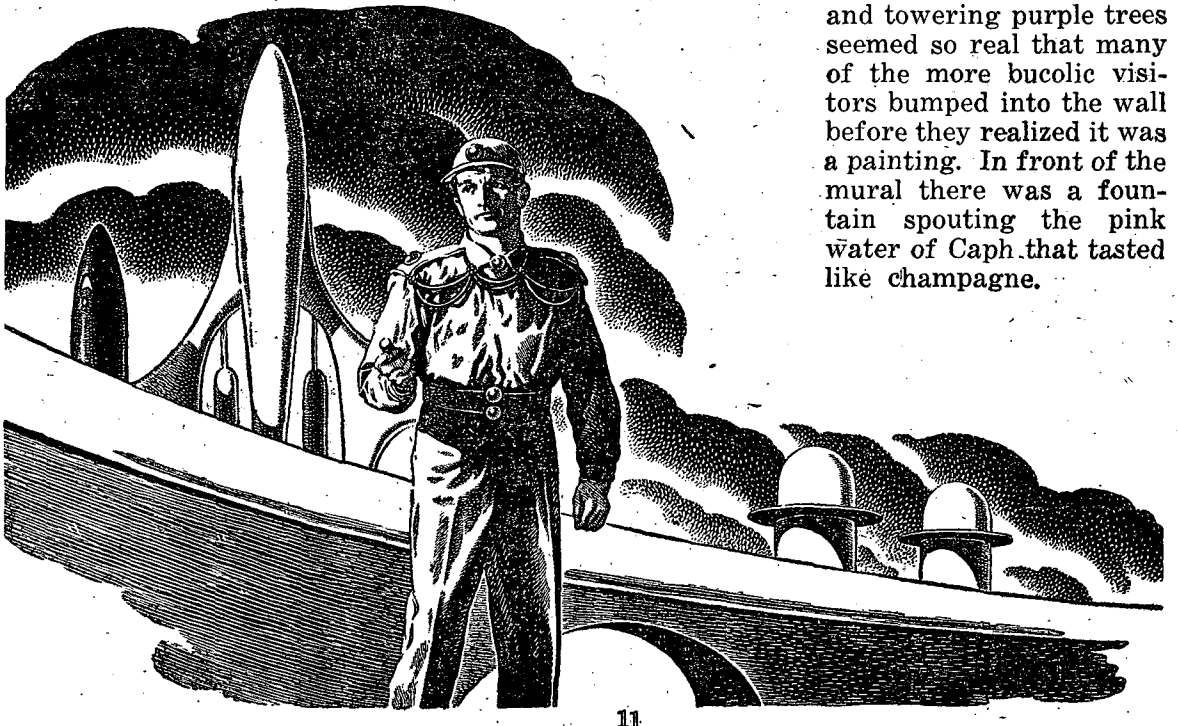
When the Secretary of Planets picked him as the dove of peace,

Manning Draco found you can't have your chaos and eat it, too!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WHISTLE STOP IN SPACE

A Novel by KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN



I

THE Draco Vacation Service occupied one floor in Interplanetary Towers in Nuyork. The seventy-second floor, to be exact. It had been decorated by one of the best robot-decorators in the Federation and looked it. On one wall of the large reception room there was a three-dimensional mural of Caph II. The blue sand and towering purple trees seemed so real that many of the more bucolic visitors bumped into the wall before they realized it was a painting. In front of the mural there was a fountain spouting the pink water of Caph that tasted like champagne.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On another wall was a montage of photographs of Caph, and blazoned across it: YOU CAN CHEAT TIME BY VACATIONING ON SUNNY CAPH, THE PLAYLAND OF THE UNIVERSE. A TWO WEEK VACATION IS TEN MONTHS ON CAPH. THE ONLY PLACE IN THE GALAXY WHERE LIFE PAYS YOU TWENTY-TO-ONE. YOU OWE CAPH TO YOURSELF.

BUSINESS was rushing, as it had been every day since the Draco Vacation Service had opened. Despite the fact that there weren't enough tour-managers to take care of the crowd, and that there was a Fomalhautan millionaire who thought it was demeaning to discuss his vacation with anyone except the president, it was only two o'clock when Manning Draco left his private office. He stopped for a moment beside the receptionist, an attractive Martian female. There were at least a dozen persons crowded around her as she answered their questions. Manning stood by her desk, apparently paying no attention to her.

Dhena, he thought, *I have to leave. It's possible that I may be gone several days. Paul Sterling will be in charge.* This was the chief reason he had hired a Martian receptionist. Telepathic communication was a great advantage when you didn't want to be overheard.

Yes, Mr. Draco. Her answering thought was clear and strong as she continued to deal with the questions of would-be vacationists. *Where will you be if we need you?*

With my back against a wall, if I know anything about it, he thought sourly. He walked across the office and took the level converter. Downstairs, he climbed into an air-cab and gave the driver the address of his home.

Manning Draco no longer lived in the tiny bachelor apartment he had once called home. Draco Vacation Service, started shortly after he had married Vega Cruikshank, had prospered right from the beginning and he had rented a modest pent-estate in the upper East side. The house, built on top of one of the giant apartment buildings, was modern in every respect and was surrounded by two acres of landscaped grounds.

Vega came running out to meet him as the cab deposited him on the landing strip in front of the house.

"Darling," she exclaimed, giving him a kiss, "you remembered and came home early."

"Remembered?" Manning asked, looking blank.

"Barnaby is five months old today," she said proudly. "You mean that isn't why you came home early?" Barnaby was, of course, Manning's and Vega's son who had been born on Caph II. He had been named after J. Barnaby Cruikshank, his grandfather, the president of the Greater Solarian Insurance Company, Monopolated, for whom Manning—in his own words—had given the best years of his life. At the age of five months, young Barnaby produced a number of gurgling sounds which Manning swore were pure Capellanese.

"I remembered his birthday," Manning said, momentarily forgetting his gloom. "I ordered him a set of atomic trains. Haven't they been delivered yet?"

"Oh, Manning," Vega said, laughing, as they went into the house. "Atomic trains. He won't be able to play with those for another six years."

"Not Barnaby," Manning declared. "He's a smart kid. He'll have them in operation before you know it."

Vega laughed again.

"But that's not the reason I'm home early," Manning said darkly.

"Sit down and relax and then you'll tell me all about it," Vega said soothingly. "Have you heard the wonderful news about father? After all these years of making big contributions to the Republocrats, he's finally been given the sort of reward he's wanted. He's been made Secretary of Planets."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That," Manning said grimly, "is why I'm home early."

VEGA recognized the tone, although she couldn't imagine what was causing it. She slipped her hand in his and waited.

"I don't know what he's up to," Manning said, "but you can be sure that it's something I won't like. He called and told me the news this afternoon. I knew it was something he'd always wanted and so I poured on a little flattery. I told him that I thought it was pretty generous of him to take time from his business to devote his talents to government. I even mentioned that the three-thirty, he'd send the police after me. He would, too."

"What are you going to do?"

"Go to Rigil Kentaurus. On the way, I'm going to try to figure out some way of legally removing a father-in-law. Come on, help me pack. I'd better take a few things. When your father has something he wants me to do I'm liable to need anything from an extra pair of socks to a few spare lives."

"All right, darling," Vega said. She followed him into their bedroom. "But if Daddy sends you chasing off to some strange planet, remember one thing, Manning Draco. No girls—not even platonic ones. No reverting to type."

Fun Is Fun

FOUR Manning Draco stories from THRILLING WONDER STORIES have now been immortalized in a hard-cover volume by Henry Holt, with one curious result. Both regular readers of science fiction and people who had never read a science fiction story before were equally entranced by the misadventures of the resourceful Draco. This argues something of a universal appeal wherever fun is fun.

Anyway, if these stories remind you of anyone, the resemblance is unintentional, purely malicious, and you were mistaken in the first place.

—*The Editor*

Federation should have more public-spirited citizens like him."

"That must have pleased him."

"Ha!" said Manning without humor. "He said he was glad that I felt that way because he had a job for me to do and he would expect me in his office on Rigil Kentaurus at three-thirty this afternoon."

"Oh," said Vega. Now she understood. "But you can't possibly leave the business now, darling! This is the middle of the vacation season."

"I explained those things to him," Manning said bitterly. "His only answer was to tell me that as Secretary of Planets he has the right to draft any citizen for special emergency jobs. He said that if I weren't in his office by

"You wrong me, dear," Manning said in wounded tones. "I never chased after women in my life. They chased me. Take, for example, that lovely girl, the former Vega—"

"All right," Vega interrupted, "only be sure that you run faster than you did when I chased you."

"I can't help it if I'm irresistible to women," Manning purred and ducked the shoe she aimed at him.

A few minutes later, a vacuum-packed traveling case under his arm, Manning Draco bestowed a brief kiss on his sleeping son, a longer one on his wife, and took an air-cab to the Nuyork spaceport. He had phoned them from the office so that his space cruiser, the *Alpha Actuary*, was already on the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

launching rack. He climbed in, cleared with the control tower, and blasted off.

When he reached the edge of atmosphere, he threw the ship into magnidrive for the ten-minute run to Rigil Kentaurus.

At exactly three-thirty Manning Draco was in the Planet Department building, being shown into the office of the Secretary.

At forty-one, J. Barnaby Cruikshank was one of the most successful men in the Galaxy. He had originally inherited the Greater Solarian Insurance Company from his grandfather, but it had been a small company barely making a profit. J. Barnaby had built it up until its assets were somewhere around one and a half trillion credits.* He had been very active in galactic politics, and much of his success was due to that, but this was the first time he'd been given active participation in the government.

J. Barnaby had always operated on the theory that chaos was just around the corner. Those who worked for Greater Solarian—as Manning had until only a few months before—were accustomed to J. Barnaby's looking as though the corner had finally been rounded. So the rumpled appearance of the new Secretary of Planets had no effect on Manning.

AS HE entered the office, he caught a glimpse of another man leaving by a side door. He was a Vegan, his skin the clear green of old jade. The weave of his light plastic suit indicated that he was a high-caste Vegan.

"Who was that?" Manning asked.

"Jimwe Gnade. Harris is being made an ambassador and the Vegan is going to be the new candidate for vice president."

"Great Fomalhaut," exclaimed Manning. "Now we're even going to have political candidates who contain chlorophyll."

"Very funny," grunted J. Barnaby. "How's Vega and little Barnaby?"

"How do you expect them to feel, losing husband and father just so you can make a big man out of yourself?"

"You've decided to do the job?" J. Barnaby asked, ignoring the remark.

"Do I have a choice?"

"Not much," J. Barnaby said with a familiar grin. "The penalty for refusing a government draft is five years."

"Little Barnaby," said Manning, "will have enough trouble living down the fact that he has you for a grandfather, so he'll need my fatherly guidance. I'll do it."

"My dear Manning," J. Barnaby said expansively, "I knew I could count on you. I've always known that there was a heart of gold beneath that—er—plain exterior. I knew I could depend on you to put aside personal considerations—"

"Don't try to make such a big thing out of it," Manning interrupted. "I said I'd do it. Now what is is you want?"

"Do you know Regulus II?"

"I know of it, but I've never been there."

"You will be, my boy, before the day is over. You, of course, know, that for years the Federation has been bothered by Acrux and its satellite systems. They have constantly tried to stir up trouble among the member planets of the Federation, as well as trying to provoke incidents which might give them an excuse to invade us. Well, an Acruxian agent is now on Regulus II."

"Why tell me about it?" Manning asked. "Sounds like a job for the Federation police."

"As a matter of fact," Barnaby said in what he imagined was a confidential tone, "this is a pretty delicate situation and I doubt if the average policeman could handle it. Then, there are reasons why there might be complaints if the matter is handled by a regular government representative."

"What reasons?" Manning asked bluntly. His eyes narrowed with suspicion. "And while you're at it, you

* And a very nice place it is to be around, too.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

might also explain what your special angle is."

"My dear Manning, my only motivation is that of the responsibility of my great office—"

"Meteor dust," snapped Manning. "Tell me the whole thing or I'll let you go ahead and put me in jail."

When he saw that Manning wouldn't give in, the pained expression faded from J. Barnaby's face. "As a matter of fact," he said, "there is a slight political aspect to the problem. As you know, there is a galactic election coming up. I should like to continue to serve as Secretary of Planets, but this will be possible only if the Republocrats are re-elected. It looks as if it might be a close race."

"And what does that have to do with Regulus and the Acruxian agent you say is there?"

"Everything," J. Barnaby said simply. "Regulus was admitted to the Federation only recently. This will be the first election in which it has taken part. Their admission to the Federation was vigorously opposed by the Achernarian planets. It is the Achernarians who represent the greatest threat to us in the coming election."

"So I'm to pull political chestnuts out of the fire for you?"

"In a way. There is an Acruxian agent on Regulus and we have no idea what he is planning in the way of sabotage. But Regulus has very lax laws about political candidates and the Acruxian agent is also running for the office of Senator from Regulus. As an independent. Because of opposition to Regulus, the only other candidate for the office is a Republocrat. A native named Xelia Zon. In order to defeat the Acruxian, you may have to do something which will help the Republocrat candidate."

MANNING frowned. "So that's why you can't use the cops," he said. "It's illegal for any government official, in that capacity, to help one candidate over another."

"That's it," J. Barnaby admitted. "If we used the police, it might provide the Achernarians with enough ammunition to defeat us. On the other hand, if we do nothing, the Acruxian agent may succeed in throwing us into war—either civil war or war with Acrux. That leaves it up to you, Manning."

"Okay. Do I have any kind of authority, or do I go merely as a nosy citizen?"

"I've arranged for you to go as an election observer for the Republocrat Party. That's about the best I could do."

"Great," Manning said dryly. "Do you have any other helpful little hints?"

"Just a reminder that it's only a couple of days until elections," J. Barnaby said briskly. "I'll expect you to have the whole thing cleaned up before then. And, Manning. . . ."

"Yes?"

"When you've got the problem whipped into shape, if you can think of some way to give the solution wide publicity, it would be appreciated."

"You don't happen to have a short-handled star-duster, do you?" Manning asked. "We could tie it on the back of my ship and I could dust off a few stars while I'm doing the other things. I wouldn't want you to think I have too much spare time on my hands."

"I'll even laugh at your jokes," J. Barnaby said sourly, "if you clear this up for us. Now, if you'll excuse me, Manning, I have an appointment with the Ambassador from Altair. . . ."

"And I remember when you only had appointments with people who wanted to buy life insurance," Manning murmured. He stood up. "Okay, father-in-law. Hold on to your striped pants." He turned and left the office.

As soon as he reached the spaceport, he blasted off. Once he was above the planet, he fed the co-ordinates of Regulus II into the automatic pilot and put the ship into magnidrive. Then he dug out an encyclotape on Acruxians and leaned back to listen to it. He could

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

learn about Regulus when he got there, but he had a hunch he'd better find out about Acruxians before he tangled with one.

II

THE *Alpha Actuary* came out of magnidrive and dropped slowly down toward the surface of Regulus II. Manning Draco stared at the landing screen and wondered if someone had been kidding him. On the entire planet there was only one building in sight and it was a modest dwelling no larger than the average mansion anywhere in the Federation. It certainly wasn't large enough to hold the population of a planet. Besides, its architecture was pure Terran.

There was a small spaceport near the single house and Manning set his ship down on it. He cut the power and threw open the air-lock.

There were two individuals waiting for him as he climbed out of the ship. The first was a Terran, a tall austere man, wearing the formal garb which was still so dear to the hearts of Terran politicians. His welcome was anything but warm.

"I suppose," he said, offering a limp handshake, "you're this Manning Draco person I was told to expect? The election observer, or some such thing?"

"Some such thing," Manning said, returning the handshake.

"Can't imagine why they send anyone—even an observer—to this miserable place," the man said, making no effort to lower his voice. "You're aware, of course, that I'm the Terran Ambassador?"

"I guessed it," Manning said dryly. "It was hard work, but I did it."

The Ambassador stared blankly back at him. "The Secretary of Planets telephoned me you were coming. I don't suppose he sent any word on my request to be transferred?"

"No."

The Ambassador sighed heavily. "Perhaps if I made a larger contribution," he murmured. "Is there anything I can do for you, Mr.—ah— what was your name?"

"Don't even try to remember it," Manning said. "I wouldn't want you to suffer any mental strain. Now, you just run along."

"I suppose this—ah— native is waiting to see you," the Ambassador said. He sniffed audibly. "Well, I really must be getting back." He turned and trotted rapidly in the direction of the house.

Manning grinned as he saw him go, then turned for his first look at a Regulusian.

The creature who faced him stood upright and was almost as tall as Manning. He wore a one-piece suit roughly similar to those worn by Terrans, although it was cut in the back to accommodate a long, round tail which was covered with short, silky hair. His hands, although still bearing a resemblance to paws, were very human-like and were also covered with silky fur. His face was rather pointed, with a receding forehead. The nose was by far the most prominent feature. Not only was it long, but on the very tip of it there were twenty-two light-pink fleshy fingers growing in the form of a star.*

"Hello," Manning said. "I'm Manning Draco. Are you here to meet me?"

"Yes," said the Regulusian, finally advancing. As he continued to speak, Manning noticed that he spoke Terran with almost no accent. "I would have introduced myself sooner, but your Ambassador is fond of the formal approach—through channels—and I did not wish to anger him. I am Xelia Zon, Mr. Draco."

"Call me Manning. I'm glad to know you, Xelia." He put out his hand and was somewhat surprised to find that the Regulusian had whipped his tail around

*Primitive Regulusians had been closely related to the Terran family *Talpidae*, species *Condylura cristata*, sometimes known as the Star-Nosed Mole. Present day Regulusians are, however, as far advanced over their ancestors as Terrans are over *Pitchecanthropus Erectus*.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and coiled it about his hand.

"I see you are surprised," said the Regulusian. "This is your first trip to Regulus?"

Manning admitted that it was.

"So few of your people come here," Xelia Zon said. "Like you Terrans, we have the custom of establishing a physical contact on being introduced. You do this by shaking hands; we do it by shaking tails. I imagine that this developed because the tail is an important sense organ to us."

"Sounds logical," Manning said. By this time he was so accustomed to the many differences through the Galaxy that he seldom thought twice about any of them.

"I believe it is one of the things which disturbs your Terran Ambassador. In fact, he was heard saying that he disliked suddenly finding a tail in his hand."

"Nothing could be worse than that limp hand he offers," Manning said with a grin. "You know why I'm here?"

"To observe our election. Or so I was informed by the chairman of the party. I'm afraid there will be little to observe."

"If you're Xelia Zon," Manning said, "then you must be the candidate for Senator."

"I was," Xelia Zon said ruefully. "As of the moment, however, the party has no candidate for the Senate. That's why I say there will be little for you to observe. I was almost hoping that the party might decide to send some sort of Federation policeman, but I suppose that was out of the question."

"The Acruxian?" Manning asked.

"The Acruxian," Xelia said, nodding. "I'll tell you all about it, but why not wait until we reach your room. I took the liberty of making a reservation for you at our best hotel. Shall we go?"

"Where?" Manning asked. He looked around again at the sparsely-shrubbed, flat ground. "I meant to ask you about your cities. I thought I saw both sides of the planet as I came in, but I didn't see anything that looked like a city, or even a village."

The Regulusian smiled, showing even, pointed teeth. "You are standing directly over our capital city right now."

Manning lifted one foot and looked down. "Dehydrated?" he asked.

Xelia Zon laughed. "Hardly. Come. I'll show you."

HE LED the way around the *Alpha Actuary* and toward a small kiosk which Manning had not previously noticed. They entered the kiosk, walked down a few steps and then into an elevator. The door closed as soon as they were in it and they lunged smoothly downward.

"Underground, eh?" Manning said. "All of your cities?"

Xelia Zon nodded. "Not only our cities, but also our farms, and every other part of our civilization."

"Protection?"

"Perhaps. More likely, tradition. We are evolved from a race which carried on its life beneath the surface of the ground, so I suppose we feel more comfortable there. Then, by now, there are many advantages. For example, we are able to get twice the yield on crops that we would on the surface."

"How? I should think the lack of sunlight. . . ."

"We plant on both the floor and the ceiling of the underground farm. As for sunlight, we grow many crops that don't require it at all, and for those that do we have methods of piping sunlight in underground—do you find the idea of living underground unpleasant?"

"Why should I?" Manning asked, shrugging. "Then that one house on the surface is our Ambassador's?"

"Yes. He flatly refused to live in Zeloha, the city to which we are going. The Ambassadors from the other Federation planets are all living in the city, although I suspect that some of them don't relish it either. You wonder, perhaps, why I tell you this?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I imagine you have your reasons," Manning said, "and when you're ready you'll tell them to me."

Xelia Zon nodded and the tiny fingers of the star on his nose flushed a darker pink.* "It is related to the reason you're here," he said. "I shall soon explain the connection."

The elevator stopped and the door slid noiselessly open. Manning followed Xelia Zon out onto a broad strip of concrete, brightly illumined by indirect lighting. Near the exit, there was a long, streamlined vehicle which Manning guessed was a Regulusian car. This turned out to be correct for Xelia led the way directly to it and they climbed in. Xelia pressed a number of buttons and the car leaped forward. Manning could feel the pull of a powerful motor, but there was practically no sound.

Xelia turned the car into a broad street and they picked up speed. After a while, they began to see other cars on the street.

Within a few minutes they had reached the edge of the city. There were a number of buildings on either side which looked as if they might be stores. Most of the signs were in an unfamiliar script which Manning assumed was Regulusian, although there were a few in Terran and other Federation languages. The buildings were all only one storey high, and the architecture mostly looked like the upper half of an egg.

"I suppose," Manning said, "that one of the penalties of building underground is that you're restricted on how high you can make your buildings. Doesn't that make the city take up a lot of space?"

Xelia Zon grinned. "I'm afraid you're still thinking in terms of Terran culture. These buildings are all of fifteen or twenty storeys and we have many that are still larger. You see, here, the street floor is the top one. Everything is built toward the core of our planet instead of skyward as you build."

"I'm beginning to get it," Manning said. "Everything works just the opposite as with us." He grinned. "Tell me, is it true what they say about Regulusian women—" He broke off as he realized Xelia Zon wasn't getting it. "Never mind. It wasn't even a very good joke when it first started on Terra a long time ago."

"If you'll notice," Xelia said, "you'll see the burrow-ways running off the street and leading down to the last floor which is usually used for parking."

Manning saw the openings, looking like tunnels, angling down from each side of the street.

BY THIS time traffic was fairly heavy and there were considerable Regulusians on the sidewalks hurrying about their business. Considering the size of the city, there were very few citizens from other planets.

Everywhere the street was bright with the same indirect lighting Manning had noticed earlier, but once they passed through a section where the quality of light was different, more like sunlight.

"It is sunlight," Xelia said when Manning asked him about it. "This is one of the sections to which we pipe sunlight from the surface. Most of the embassies from other planets are in this section and it is done here for their convenience."

Finally Xelia's car darted into one of the burrow-ways and began the descent. When he braked the car to a stop, they were obviously inside a building. There were a number of other cars parked on the floor.

"This," Xelia said, answering the expression on Manning's face before he could put it into words, "is the top floor —you would call it the bottom floor— of the hotel where you will stay." He opened the car door and stepped out.

Manning followed him. "By the way,"

* Whenever a Regulusian is pleased his nose blushes. Since the Regulusians are the least meddlesome race in the Galaxy, this led to Professor Horatio Schlemozel offering the facetious explanation that the Regulusians' noses blushed with pride because they weren't being thrust into anybody else's business.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Feathers swirled in the air and then it went down . . .

he said casually, "are the Regulusians telepathic?"

Xelia Zon looked at him in surprise, then laughed. "Oh—you ask because I answered your question before you asked it? We Regulusians are very sensitive to expressions and attitudes. Quite often I have a good idea of what you're going to say just before you speak. But that's all. As you probably know, there aren't many telepathic races. The Martians, Rigelians, Sabikians, I believe, and Acruxians. Like many of the non-telepathic races, we Regulusians have natural barriers to telepathic readings."

Manning had already discovered this, but he only nodded as they entered an elevator.

"I've heard," Xelia continued, "that there is at least one Terran who is not only telepathic, but also has developed a secondary mind-shield, which is quite rare even among telepathic races. But,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of course, this may be one of those rumors that get around."

Manning didn't bother to tell him that he was the one Terran who possessed this unusual mental equipment. He was certain that the Regulusian was trustworthy, but there was no point in taking chances. He had already learned that Acruxians were telepaths; if the Acruxian agent who was on Regulus didn't learn of Manning's unique ability, it might one day prove a slight advantage.

They stopped on the next floor and confirmed the reservation. Again, as they passed through the lobby, Manning saw that nearly everyone there was a Regulusian. He did catch sight of a couple of Vegans, a Capellan, and a Polluxian who was obviously a traveling salesman, but it was a small number of nonnatives for such a large city.

Again they took an elevator. "This," said Manning as the elevator surged upward, "at least, is a familiar sensation. We're going *up* to reach the room."

"Actually," said Xelia with a smile, "we are going down, since we entered what we call the top floor."

"I've often been accused of not knowing down from up," Manning said dryly, "but this is the first time it's ever been proved."

XELIA chuckled as the elevator stopped. They followed the Regulusian bellhop down the corridor to a room. It was, Manning saw as soon as they entered, completely equipped for Terrans. This was not unusual in the Galaxy, but what was unusual in such a modern city was that Manning had not seen another Terran since they'd left the Ambassador on the surface. He commented on this to Xelia.

"Yes," Xelia said soberly. "We have provided many typically Terran conveniences, but very few of your race ever comes here. Those who do mostly react as your Ambassador. Would you care to join me in a drink? We also have Terran beverages."

"I'll have whatever you're having," Manning said. He was always inclined to try native drinks despite a couple of bad experiences. Once, on Praesepe I, it had taken two days to recover his voice after such an adventure.

Xelia ordered the drinks over a plain audiphone attached to the wall of the room.

"No visiphone?" Manning asked.

Xelia shook his head. "We have no visicasts at all. I suppos that eventually we'll be getting sets since the Federation visicasts will now be beamed to us, but we Regulusians have always preferred actually being present at our entertainment instead of watching some reproduction of it." He smiled slightly. "We are, of course, considered backward because of this and because we have never tried to develop space flight."

A light blinked on the wall and a panel slid open, revealing their drinks. Xelia took the two glasses and handed one to Manning. It was filled with a cloudy purple liquid which was rather horrible to look at but which, Manning discovered, tasted very pleasant. He sipped the drink and waited for Xelia to speak.

"Since you've never been to Regulus," Xelia said finally, "I should like to explain something about my people. It has a bearing on the election and the Acruxian. As you know, our admission to the Federation was opposed by many, especially the Achernarians. Their feeling is based on the fact that Achernarians are evolved from various forms of insect life and there was a time when primitive Regulusians ate insects. That was, however, many generations ago. The Achernarians of today are quite different from the insects my ancestors found so delectable, and we have also changed. The protein life which we still eat has been carefully bred from a type of insect found only on Regulus. It is not an intelligent form of life and might be compared to the cattle you Terrans have bred for food."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Manning nodded. As an insurance investigator he had traveled over enough of the Galaxy to be familiar with the many prejudices that existed. "The Achernarians have sent an Ambassador here, haven't they?" he asked.

"Yes. No one ever sees him, but he's here. Now, Manning, you see we are hated and feared by a number of life-forms in the Federation. Then you Terrans—I hope you will forgive me if I speak frankly—are inclined to view us with something like contempt. The attitude of your Ambassador is an excellent example. I don't find this attitude in you, Manning, but it is what we've come to expect from most Terrans. As a result, there is a lot of anti-Terran, even anti-human, feeling on Regulus, as well as considerable anti-Federation propaganda."

"Understandable," said Manning. "In fact, it's not even peculiar to Regulus."

AT THIS Xelia nodded. "I was one of of the leaders of the movement which led to Regulus joining the Federation. Not because I believe in accepting the way we're treated, but because I believe it is necessary for our own safety. I therefore favor co-operation, without accepting submission. Because of this, I have long been an object of attack from the anti-Terran and anti-Federation forces. Which brings us to the election. I was, as you know, the Republocratic candidate for Senator from Regulus. The other political parties did not nominate candidates here and I was the only one running until Dtilla Raishelle declared himself an independent candidate."

"Dtilla Raishelle? The Acruxian?"

Xelia nodded.

"Tell me one thing," Manning said. "How is it possible for an Acruxian to run for a Regulusian office? Acrux is not even a part of the Federation."

"True," Xelia said. "We, however, still have many antiquated laws on our statute books. In the old days, no one from other planets ever came to Regulus. So our laws state that anyone who owns property on Regulus is considered a citizen and may run for political office. Dtilla Raishelle bought a house when he arrived here a month ago."

"And he is backed by the anti-Terran movement?"

"Completely. His platform is entirely anti-Terran and anti-Achernarian. From the beginning he had such strong support that I knew it would be difficult for me to win. Now it is impossible."

"What do you mean?"

"I am no longer a candidate," Xelia said bitterly. His nose had faded to a pale pink which was almost white. "More of our ancient laws. Seldom enforced, we have laws which compel candidates to submit to various physical tests such as walking tightropes, juggling, and sleight-of-hand. It is also permitted for a candidate to challenge an opposing candidate to any sort of a personal test, or duel. When this happens, the loser, if still alive, must automatically withdraw from the political race. There is no choice. You cannot refuse the challenge and a loser cannot remain a candidate."

"The Acruxian challenged you to a duel?"

"If you know anything about Acruxians, you know of their fabulous strength. I had no chance. The duel was held last night in the Shaun Arena. Dtilla Raishelle is now the only candidate for Regulusian Senator."

"Can't the Republocrats nominate another candidate?"

"No. It would make no difference if we could. I'm sure no one would agree to run—otherwise they could declare themselves an independent. Besides, there is no Regulusian who is a match for an Acruxian and there would merely be another challenge. That's why I said there would be little for you to observe."

The more he heard, the more Manning Draco wished he was back in his own office with nothing more complex to worry about than the vacation prob-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lems of a honeymooning threesome from Sirius. "There is a feeling on Terra," he said slowly, "that this Acruxian may have more in mind than merely running for office. As a Senator from Regulus, he could be a nuisance, but that is all. Do you think he might have something else in mind?"

"I'm sure of it," Xelia said firmly, "but I have no idea what it is, I was suspicious of him when he first arrived. I asked our Central Security to give me complete reports on his movements. There is nothing in those reports which mean anything—unless he and the Achernarians are planning something together."

"Why he and the Achernarians?" Manning asked.

"Since arriving here, he has made a number of speeches and has attended parties which were held for political purposes. These are normal activities for a candidate. But he has also paid three visits to the Achernarian Ambassador."

"Okay," Manning said. "I think I'd like to meet this Acruxian."

"That's easily arranged," Xelia said. His tone indicated that he didn't think the meeting, or anything else, would accomplish much. "There's a political party tonight—to celebrate the Acruxian's forthcoming victory, as a matter of fact. You can go as my guest."

"Good," said Manning. He finished his drink. "After I've looked him over, I'd like to see the reports you had on him. Maybe we can figure out something. In the meantime, if you don't mind, I think I'll rest."

"Certainly," said Xelia, standing up. "I shall pick you up in about three hours. I trust you will rest well." He offered his tail for a brief shaking, then left. It was obvious that he liked Manning personally but had given up expecting anything that would help the situation.

Manning stretched out on the bed and went to sleep. He had a hunch that there might be little sleep between now and the election and he might as well get what he could.

III

MANNING DRACO was waiting in the hotel room when Xelia Zon came back that evening. He had awakened earlier and had dinner in his room so that he was ready to go. They went down (Xelia insisted it was up) and climbed into the Regulusian's car.

After a short drive through the city streets, Xelia stopped before an ornate private home. A formally-attired Regulusian butler met them at the door and conducted them to the elevator. They dropped down some ten floors where they were met by another servant. He led them through a number of well-appointed rooms and out into a splendid underground garden. It was filled with strange, beautiful flowers and shrubs and had piped-in sunlight.

The party was well under way, the guests being almost exclusively Regulusians. While he was not openly insulted, it soon became obvious that most of those present were anti-Terran. There were only a few who were friends of Xelia and were consequently friendly toward him.

Almost as soon as they'd entered the garden, Manning had noticed a group at one end of the garden. There was a creature in the center of the group, towering over them, who was undoubtedly the Acruxian. He guessed that Xelia had also caught sight of them, for they were slowly working toward that end of the garden.

They had just stopped a passing servant and snared two drinks from his tray, and were walking on toward the one group, when Manning felt a hand on his arm. "Well," said a husky voice, "this is a pleasant surprise."

Manning looked around, then did a double-take. At first glance, he thought she was a Terran. It was only when he looked much closer than he realized her head was covered with silky blonde fur

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

instead of hair. But that was the only way in which she differed from a Terran girl. She had all the other Terran feminine attributes, in the right places and in the right amounts, adding up to one of the most beautiful creatures he had ever seen. Her figure was one which would make any man glad that the styles of 3473 featured a great deal of exposed skin.

"Hello," he said. "Do I know you?"

"No, but you will," she said. Her voice had those husky tones that for many centuries had sent shivers running down the spines of Terran males. Her eyes, great golden orbs, seemed to contain the same quality—a nameless yearning to which men were drawn in the hope that they could satisfy it. "I had almost given up hope of seeing a fellow humanoid on this planet when you walked in."

"Fellow humanoid?" Manning said.

She laughed, her voice like sensual music. "I can hardly say a fellow human, can I? I'm not human, you know."

Manning was trying to place her. There were a number of humanoid races throughout the Federation, notably the Martians and the Muphridians. They were remarkably like the humans of Terra, although their origins were usually quite different, although there was nearly always some one difference. Quite often, it was the hair. The Muphridians, for example, had feathers in place of hair. He was sure that this girl was from none of the places he had visited.

In the meantime, the girl was speaking again. "Xelia Zon," she was saying, "the least you can do is introduce me to your charming Terran friend."

"Manning," Xelia said, not especially happily, "this is Velmar Shonda. Manning Draco."

"What a lovely name," exclaimed the girl. "I may call you Manning, may I not?"

"You may," Manning said. "Where are you from? I don't think I've ever met anyone who looked exactly like you."

"I'm from Aldebaran. But from the *third* planet in the system, if you please."

Manning had the feeling that there was something about the Aldebaranese that he should know, but it eluded him. He wondered what she was doing on Regulus and if it had any bearing on the reason he was there. He glanced at Xelia Zon and the latter must have seen the question in his face.

"I don't know what she's doing here," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "She has been here for about two months, I understand, although this is only the fourth or fifth time I've seen her."

THE girl from Aldebaran laughed again. "Your Regulusian friend doesn't like me," she said. She managed somehow to make "Regulusian" sound like an unflattering word. "That is why he is so blunt, Manning. But I am here on a visit, just as you are. I came intending to stay only a few days, but the natives are so quaint I've stayed longer. I am what you Terans call an anthropologist. It has been rather lonely, of course—but I can see that won't be true after tonight."

Marriage had worked several changes in Manning Draco. He loved Vega and liked being married to her. He had every intention of remaining faithful to her, not because the Terran tradition was as strong as it had once been but because he believed that a life with her could be complete. At the same time, he was a normal enough man to be flattered by Velmar's attitude and to have a certain amount of response to it.

"By the way," she said, "have you met the Acruxian who is here? Dtilla Raishelle?"

"We were just on our way to meet him," Manning said.

"Oh, let me introduce you," she said, urging him forward with her hand on his arm. "He is such a fascinating character."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I can hardly wait," Manning said dryly. But he went forward under her urging and Xelia Zon kept pace with them.

As they neared the group which contained the Acruxian, Manning Draco controlled that part of his mind which worked in front of the secondary shield, so that it would seem that he was nothing more than another curious Terran. He knew that the Acruxian would probably try a brief mental probe and if his first response was no more than that he would probe no farther and so would not discover the secondary shield.

Velmar Shonda cleared a way through the little group until they stood in front of the Acruxian. "Manning," she said, "I'd like you to meet the distinguished Regulusian candidate for the Assembly of the Stars, the future Senator from Regulus, Dtilla Raishelle. Senator Dtilla, this is Manning Draco of Terra."

As he'd expected, Manning felt the mental power of the Acruxian nibble briefly at his thoughts. Then apparently satisfied, it withdrew.

"I am deeply honored," the Acruxian said in a booming voice, extending a tentacle. Like all Acruxians, he had difficulty in pronouncing the letter "r" but otherwise his Terran was impeccable.

"The pleasure is all mine," returned Manning. He reached out and grasped the proffered tentacle, immediately raising his hand high in the air in the Acruxian manner of shaking hands (or shaking tentacles, to be exact).

"Ah, said the Acruxian, "you are familiar with the customs of my people?"

"Only to a small degree," Manning said modestly, not bothering to add that he had learned all he knew that afternoon from an encyclotape and this was the first time he had ever seen anyone from Acrux.

Dtilla Raishelle was a typical Acruxian. He stood seven feet tall, his huge cylindrical body supported on three sturdy legs. His body was dark gray in color and was bare except for a dark green fringed skirt, which was an Acruxian ceremonial dress. A holster, attached to the skirt, held a ceremonial tri-blast.* His head was a round knob, pale red, perfectly smooth except for a mouth opening and inverted ears which were covered by fine, sensitive hairs. He had four tentacles, two at waist level and two at shoulder level. Two eye-stalks reared several inches above his head. **

AT THE moment, the eye-stalks were sharply inclined toward Manning and there was an expression of suspicion in them. As the Acruxian very well knew, few ordinary Terrans knew anything about Acruxians. It had been many generations since anything but a merciless cold war had existed between Acrux and its satellites and the more dominant planets of the Federation.

At this moment, Manning spoke a few words in the quick, liquid Acruxian language—a ceremonial greeting of respect which he had learned that afternoon from a linguatape.

"You speak my language, too," Dtilla Raishelle exclaimed. His voice indicated pleasure, but the suspicion in his eyes deepened.

"Just that one sentence," Manning said. "My father was once space-wrecked near your home and I guess he picked up those few things which he taught me."

Once more he felt the Acruxian probe his surface thought, but he was prepared for it and the memory there was just as he said. The Acruxian suddenly relaxed, although there was still a touch of suspicion in his eyes. Just enough,

* The tri-blast was a three-barrelled blade-gun peculiar to Acrux. It was used in all ceremonial duels and was designed to amputate all three legs of the opponent.

** Although, as this description shows, somewhat of a sport model, Acruxians are related to Rigelians. As more ancient readers will recognize, Dtilla Raishelle was, therefore, a distant cousin of Dzanku Dzanku, the Rigelian who was for so long the deadly enemy of Manning Draco. It had taken Manning a full year to best Dzanku and get rid of him in a Time-Fracture which made it impossible for Dzanku to return short of a century.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Manning hoped. He didn't want to precipitate a contest with the Acruxian, but he did want him to be enough on guard so that he might later make a move which would help trap him.

It was then that Manning noticed the unusually large piece of luggage which sat on the ground beside Dtilla's feet. It was at least three and a half feet long and probably two feet high. It was made of some shining metallic plastic. There were tentacle-loops along the top for easy carrying.

"What's that?" Manning asked. "You're not leaving, are you—just when everyone says your election is a sure thing?"

"No," Dtilla Raishelle said. He hesitated and Manning could guess that he was trying to decide what sort of answer would be believed. Manning would have liked to try a swift mental probe, but knew it might be a serious mistake. Still, without even trying, he could feel mental waves of hatred which must be coming from the Acruxian. He was sure they weren't coming from the Regulusians or the Aldebaranese—he'd already discovered that she had a natural shield to telepathy. That left only Dtilla, unless—he quickly suppressed the thought for fear the Acruxian might catch it.

"This," Dtilla continued, indicating the box, "contains many of the rare, delicate perfumes of my home planet. I believe they are too subtle for most other life forms, but they help to make my stay away from home more comfortable." His eye-stalks turned to survey the Regulusians. "I don't believe that I ever offered the details to you, my friends, having only told you that it was a custom of my people. I am sorry if my previous reticence has offended you in any way."

"No, no," exclaimed several Regulusians.

"Well," Manning said, "we mustn't interrupt your conversation with your friends any longer—"

"Think nothing of it," Dtilla Raishelle said, waving his tentacles. It was obvious that he was still mildly curious about Manning. "I have not seen many Terrans here. Are you on a business trip?"

Even as he was speaking, Manning decided to answer with part of the truth. He believed that he had convinced the Acruxian that he was a fairly ordinary Terran; now it was time to let him know that even so he might be an enemy.

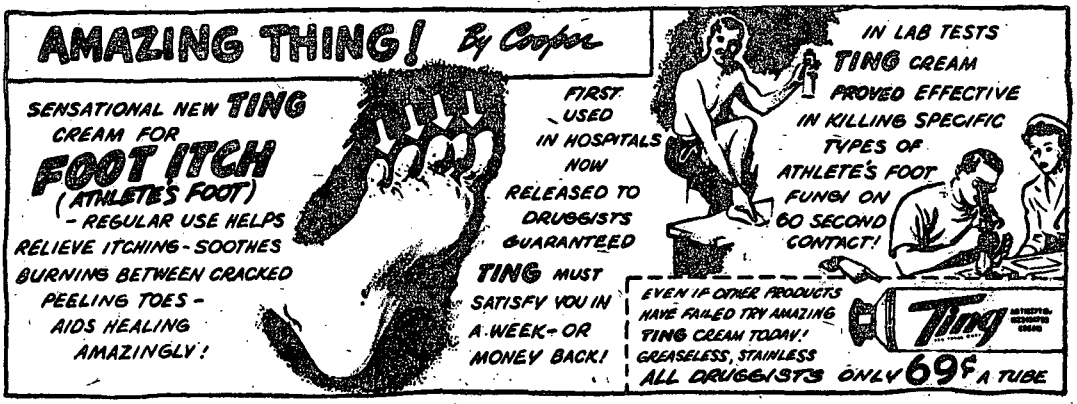
"In a way," Manning said. "I'm here for the elections. As an observer—although I don't suppose there will be much to observe."

"An observer, eh? But not to interfere, I hope. I believe that is illegal."

"I wouldn't think of interfering," Manning said. "I shall probably sit on the sidelines and hope that the best man wins."

"Inasmuch as I am the only remain-

[*Turn page*]


AMAZING THING! By Cooper
SENSATIONAL NEW TING CREAM FOR FOOT ITCH (ATHLETE'S FOOT)
- REGULAR USE HELPS RELIEVE ITCHING - SOOTHES BURNING BETWEEN CRACKED PEELING TOES - AIDS HEALING AMAZINGLY!
FIRST USED IN HOSPITALS NOW RELEASED TO DRUGGISTS GUARANTEED
TING MUST SATISFY YOU IN A WEEK - OR MONEY BACK!
IN LAB TESTS TING CREAM PROVED EFFECTIVE IN KILLING SPECIFIC TYPES OF ATHLETE'S FOOT FUNGI ON 60 SECOND CONTACT!
EVEN IF OTHER PRODUCTS HAVE FAILED TRY AMAZING TING CREAM TODAY! GREASELESS, STAINLESS
ALL DRUGGISTS ONLY 69¢ A TUBE
Ting

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing candidate in the Senatorial race," the Acruxian said, and his amusement was evident in the agitation of his eyestalks, "I believe the identity of the best—er—man is a foregone conclusion."

"Maybe," Manning said. "But there's an old Terran proverb—which I just invented—that says there's many an obstacle between the loot and the tentacle. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'd like to devote more of my time to this young lady."

Pulling Velmar Shonda with him, Manning Draco walked away, conscious that the Acruxian was watching him with renewed interest.

"I salute your going away," Dtilla Raishelle called after him.*

As they left the Acruxian, Xelia Zon joined another group of Regulusians, while Manning and Velmar walked on and sat down beneath one of the umbrella-like shrubs.

"You shouldn't have been so hard on Dtilla," Velmar said. "He's really a fascinating creature and terribly brilliant and talented."

"I don't doubt it," Manning said. "Why are you defending him? Are you his girl friend?"

"Goodness, no," Velmar Shonda said, laughing. "I admire creatures like Dtilla and I confess I find his mind very stimulating. But that's all. We Aldebaranese are—constructed very much like Terrans and when it comes to the more intimate relationships in life, I much prefer a handsome Terran—like you."

This was a new experience for Manning. In the past, he had always met such advances more than half way. He knew what to do when a woman said no; he'd never learned how to say no himself.

"I—I'm married," he said defensively.

"I like married men," Velmer Shonda declared. "Then, too, they are not so apt to become all squishy if there's a slight accident, and insist on marrying you."

"Er—" said Manning, which was not a brilliant beginning, but was all he could think of at the moment. Fortunately, he didn't have to think any further for Xelia Zon arrived at that moment.

"I'm sorry," he said politely, "but I think we'd better leave, Manning. You remember you wanted to make one other stop before we returned to the hotel."

"Of course," Manning exclaimed. He got to his feet, relieved, and his aplomb returned with the rescue. He looked down and grinned at the Aldebaranese. "I'm sorry, honey, but I have to run along. I'll see you soon."

"Sooner than you expect," she answered, and it seemed that the strange hunger in her eyes was stronger. "Goodby—for now."

IV

AT THE offices of the Regulusian Central Security, Xelia Zon spoke to an official who was also a friend of his and a few minutes later they were in a small room with the complete reports on Dtilla Raishelle. Manning read them rapidly, but thoroughly.

"What's this?" he asked, stopping with a finger pointing to one paragraph. "Something about Dtilla and the missing Regulusians."

"It was a false lead," Xelia said. "For a time, they thought they had something on the Acruxian, but it didn't work out."

"But what was it?" Manning insisted.

"A strange thing," said Xelia, frowning. "During the past six weeks or so a number of Regulusians—ten of them to be exact—have vanished mysteriously. No trace of them has been found at all. At first, it was thought that per-

* This was only an approximate translation of the Acruxian expression Dtilla had in mind. In the original, it was one of those double-meaning phrases so common to Acrux in which Dtilla was saying goodby and at the same time implying that Manning was leaving because he recognized his own inferior status. Dr. Homer Aybar, who has done the only Dictionary of Acruxian Idioms, speaks of such phrases as "the insult elegant."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

haps the Acruxian had murdered them, but then some of them vanished at times when he couldn't possibly have had anything to do with them."

"Maybe they were just murdered," Manning murmured, going back to reading the reports.

"Not unless they were murdered by outsiders," Xelia said. "We have no crime of any sort on Regulus. There has never been a murder committed by a Regulusian in the history of our race."

"Really?" Manning said, momentarily interested. "No wonder you have trouble fitting into the Federation." He bent over the reports again.

There was nothing in them that Xelia hadn't already told him. Dtilla Raishelle had made speeches and gone to political parties and he had made three visits to the Achernarian Ambassador. The rest of the time he had stayed in the house he'd purchased.

"I had hoped," Manning said as they handed the reports back, "that I'd find some reference to that piece of luggage Dtilla had with him tonight. I wonder if he carries it with him every time he goes out."

"He's had it every time I've seen him, but that doesn't cover all his activities," Xelia said. He looked at his friend, the official.

"The ones who made these reports," the official said, "are not on duty tonight. You might return tomorrow and ask them, if you like."

Manning nodded and turned away. Xelia Zon joined him and they left the building.

"Why are you so interested in the Acruxian's luggage?" Xelia asked.

"Because he was lying about why he had it with him," Manning said. "I'm sure of that. I think he offered a story which he thought I would be willing to accept. Therefore, the luggage must in some way be important to his scheme, whatever it is."

"If you think it important," Xelia said, "perhaps we could trick him away from it long enough to let a Central Security locksmith get at it. We have some clever ones."

"Pick the lock, Xelia? I thought you Regulusians knew nothing about crime."

"It would be no crime, done by an official in the name of Security," Xelia explained. "Shall we try it?"

Manning shook his head. "It would only make him step up his schedule if it failed—and I'm sure it would. I believe that your locksmiths are clever, but I understand that Acruxians have a way with locks which is unmatched in the universe. They have a small tendril on one tentacle which permits them to read any lock. Not only can they pick locks anywhere, but they are able to build such intricate locks that they defy picking by anyone else."

Xelia was silent until they had almost reached the hotel. He seemed embarrassed when he finally did speak.

"I like you, Manning," he said, "so I hesitate to mention this—but aren't you exceeding your authority as a political observer? I know there are stiff penalties for interfering in any way with an election—which is what Dtilla Raishelle might claim—and I'd hate to see you get in trouble."

"Thanks, Xelia," Manning said. "No, I'm not exceeding it yet. As of this moment, I'm just curious and *that* hasn't as yet been outlawed. But I would like to know what our Acruxian is up to."

"So would I," murmured Xelia.

THEY arrived at the hotel and started through the lobby. They were almost to the elevator when they heard the desk clerk calling.

"Mr. Draco," the clerk said, "there was someone here to see you. It was rather peculiar—he insisted on asking all sorts of questions as to where you were and when you'd be back, but I could have sworn that he wasn't really listening to my answers. Even so, I had quite a time getting rid of him."

"Did he leave his name?" Manning asked.

The clerk nodded. "Chaun Cla, of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this city. He said that he would call again."

Manning looked at Xelia. The latter nodded. "I know the name. He is one of those who has been supporting Dtilla Raishelle and was with him there in the garden tonight."

Manning grinned. "I thought we might expect something. Dtilla doesn't think I represent much of a threat, but he doesn't want to take any chances. They're up to something."

"Should I call my friend at Central Security and ask him to keep a check on Chaun Cla?"

"It might be a good idea," said Manning. "I'll go on up to the room. Come up when you're through."

"I'll come *down* when I'm through," Xelia said with a grin.

Manning laughed and went to the elevator. Arriving on his floor, he went down the corridor keeping a careful watch, but he saw nothing out of order. He listened at the door of his room for a minute, but heard nothing. There was some faint exotic perfume in the corridor.

He unlocked his door and went in. Velmar Shonda, the Aldebaranese beauty, was sitting in the room, amusement in her golden eyes.

"Hello, Manning," she said huskily. "I told you I'd see you sooner than you expected."

"How did you get in here?" Manning asked.

She shrugged. "One of the bellhops. They are susceptible to feminine wiles and money. I used both."

She stood up and came close to him. Her perfume washed over him like waves of desire.

"Manning," she said softly, "I know that most Terran men like their females to be receptive rather than aggressive. But I have no patience for the tricks of Terran females. I like you—why shouldn't I say so? I have been here two months without any male of my kind—"

She leaned closer to him, her breasts almost brushing his chest. Her parted lips were a deep red and he could glimpse the white teeth between them. Her eyes were like melting gold—plus that something else which was almost familiar, but not quite.

"Manning—" she said, knowing that he understood and that the rest didn't have to be said.

ALTHOUGH he never admitted it to anyone but himself, it was a struggle. If Xelia hadn't been coming to the room, Manning knew that he might not have had the peculiar strength that it needed to shake his head at what was being offered.

"Honey," he said as lightly as he could, "you're a beautiful hunk of woman. Maybe you're in the right room, but it's the wrong time. My friend will be here any minute."

"Send him away," she said.

"I can't," Manning answered and the regret in his voice wasn't all pretended. "It's important. He and I have to talk."

She pouted and her yellow eyes seeemd to get larger.

"There'll be other times, honey," he said. He didn't know whether he meant it or not; he did know that he had a feeling that it would be a mistake to make an enemy of her.

She straightened up and looked at him curiously. "There have not been many men who shook their heads at Velmar Shonda," she said. Then she shrugged and some part of the amusement returned to her eyes. "As you say, for now. But do not keep me waiting too long, Manning."

She was gone, leaving the room so silently that he was almost unaware of her going. But the air of the room was still heavy with her scent. Manning dropped heavily into the chair and loosened the collar of his one-piece suit.

"Whew," he said.

The scent was still strong in the room when Xelia Zon arrived. Manning saw

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the fingers of his nose* twitch but he made no reference to the perfume.

"My friend will see that the activities of Chaun Cla are checked," he said.

Manning nodded. "Okay," he said. He grinned at the Regulusian. "I guess I ought to make arrangements for you to chaperon me day and night while I'm here. It might be safer."

Xelia Zon pretended to first notice the scent of perfume. "Velmar Shonda?" he asked.

"In person," said Manning. "Just being in the same room with her is like a post graduate course in seduction. If she's a fair example, no wonder Aldebaran industry is so far behind the rest of the Federation."

"I am not familiar with the Aldebaran civilization," Xelia said solemnly, but there was a discernible twinkle in his eyes.

"There's very little exchange between Aldebaran and the rest of the Federation and I'm beginning to understand why," Manning said. His face grew thoughtful. "You know, Xelia, the actions of Chaun Cla were like a delaying tactic. Do you suppose it was to help her get into my room? Could she be working for Dtilla Raishelle?"

"She might be. I believe that she has been very friendly with the Acruxian. And they did arrive here at about the same time."

"I thought of that," Manning said. "Still, why go through all that business with the desk clerk? She said that she bribed a bellhop to let her in and I think she was telling the truth. Maybe she is working for Dtilla, but Chaun Cla must have been covering up for something else." He was silent a moment, then got to his feet.

"I've just thought of something," he said quietly. "Maybe it was a three-way job. Velmar Shonda was in my room when I arrived. I assure you that was enough to keep me from thinking about anything else. Maybe that was the point."

"What do you mean?"

"Let's search the room. And be careful, Xelia. There are some nasty species in the Galaxy and some of them may be concealed in here."

THEY covered every inch of the room without finding anything that shouldn't have been there. Although he hadn't been aware of working faster than usual, Manning was breathing hard and there was a strange ringing in his ears as he dropped into a chair.

"Nothing," he said. "I don't get it."

"Maybe—maybe—" Xelia Zon seemed to be having trouble getting his words out and he was clawing at his neck.

As he watched the Regulusian, Manning realized that his own breath was getting shorter instead of improving now that he was resting. He struggled to his feet and crossed the room. The effort was almost too much, but he made it to the door and flung it open. He could almost feel the air pressure going up again.

There was something clinging to the other side of the door, but Manning ignored it for the moment. He leaned against the wall of the room and gratefully sucked air into his lungs. Across the room, Xelia Zon was doing the same, his nose slowly turning to its normal color.

"That was a close one," Manning said, finally straightening up. "A little more and I might not have been able to reach the door."

Xelia Zon's gaze was riveted on the door. "What's that?" he asked pointing.

The thing on the door looked like a huge balloon covered with short fur. It was perfectly round, perhaps two feet in diameter, and at first glance seemed to have no appendages.

Manning looked at it with interest. "I never saw one before," he said, "but I suddenly remember hearing about it on the encyclotape. Come over here and look at it."

* There was considerable misunderstanding between Terrans and Regulusians when they first met. For a long time the Terrans thought that every Regulusian they met was thumbing his nose at them.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Xelia Zon joined him as he bent over to look at it. On closer examination, they could see that there was a small mouth which was glued to the keyhole. Even as they watched, the mouth muscles relaxed and the ball dropped slowly. It bounced on the floor once and then began floating out into the corridor. Manning reached out and grabbed it. He held it by the short fur and the ball slowly revolved as though the round, pursed mouth was searching.

"What is it?" Xelia asked again.

"An Acruxian pet," Manning said. "It's native to Acrux and every Acruxian has at least one for a pet. Normally, they fill themselves with just enough air to float around. But if they're removed from Acrux, they become ravenous for air.* Only they can't suck up enough unless they find some sort of container with a hole about the size of mouth. I guess these modern, air-tight rooms are perfect for them."

"A pet?" Xelia said. He shivered. "That's not my idea of a pet. It could have killed us."

"I think that was the idea," Manning said. He bounced the *Heliumitis* on the floor like a basketball and caught it. "This, however, is about the only circumstance under which it would try to kill us, so we shouldn't blame it too much."

"Dtilla or Velmar Shonda?"

"Maybe both. No—it couldn't have been Velmar. The door was open when she left and remained open until you arrived. Besides," he added dryly, "she couldn't have been carrying it. She had no place of concealment this large. It must have been Dtilla or one of his friends. Probably hid on this floor, maybe in another room, and waited until we were in here. And that's probably the explanation of Chaun Cla. He was giving somebody the chance to sneak up here in advance."

"What about that thing?" asked Xelia, indicating the ball. "Hadn't we better turn it over to Central Security?"

"Why?" Manning asked. "It's harmless enough. That mouth is the only surface organ it has and it doesn't consume anything but air. You Regulusians drive surface cars—you must have places where you can put air in your tires."

"Of course, but—"

"That's it, then," Manning said. "We'll take it down and attach it to an air hose. When it's had enough air, it'll float away and we'll never see it again."

"But if Dtilla did this thing, shouldn't he be arrested?"

"On what charge?"

"Attempted murder. You said yourself that he must have done this."

"I'm sure he did," Manning said, "but we wouldn't have a chance of proving it. The most we could prove is that he was careless in letting his pet get away. Since this is the sort of pet every Acruxian has, we couldn't prove that he brought it to Regulus for a sinister purpose. Even though a Federation court would lean on our side, Dtilla could just laugh us off. And it would be a big mistake."

"How?"

"Since we couldn't prove anything, having him arrested would do nothing except give Acrux an excuse for declaring war against the Federation. If we handed Dtilla to the Federation, they'd drop him like a hot rocket."

"But why?" persisted Xelia. "Surely the Federation could win any war with Acrux and her satellites."

"Maybe," Manning said. "But I think the government is afraid that there

---

* **The Heliumitis Acruxa** is a small animal indigenous to the planets in the system of Acrux. It is a very simple organism, deriving all of its nourishment from air. Normally it keeps itself inflated to about a foot in diameter, constantly drawing in enough air to feed itself and to maintain that size. But if it is removed from Acrux, it immediately becomes obsessed with the desire to return and spends all of its time trying to obtain enough air to increase its size to the point where it can escape the gravity of whatever planet it is on. One **Heliumitis** has been known to create a complete vacuum in a space ship within a period of three hours and the destruction of at least one ship and its entire crew is known to have been so caused. In the early days, when Acrux was first discovered, a number of these creatures were taken to Terra. Immediately afterward there was an epidemic of flat tires on surface-cars and it was two weeks before it was discovered that the damage was due to the animals. Since that time, their possession has been outlawed on Terra, although in every other respect they are harmless.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

might not be any Federation. You yourself have spoken about how the Achernarians feel about Regulusians. Well, you can multiply that over and over. Capellans hate the Polluxians, the Procyonese hate the Arcturusians, Vegans hate the Achernarians—and there are groups on Terra who hate everyone except themselves. All of this could make some little clambake. . . . Well, let's take bouncing-boy here downstairs for his airing."

V

MANNING DRACO was up early the following morning. After breakfast in his room, he went to the lobby and arranged to hire a car and driver. He knew that Xelia would have taken him anywhere he wanted to go, but he had at least one visit to make which would be more successful if he were alone.

When the rented car arrived, he directed the driver to take him to the Achernarian Embassy.

It was considerably larger than any other building he had seen, extending back from the street almost twice as far as the average Regulusian building.

Having the driver wait, Manning stood in front of a viewing plate and requested an interview with Seero Sna, Ambassador from Achernar. He identified himself as a political observer from the government and tried to imply that he was completely non-partisan. After a moment the door clicked open and a voice invited him to take the elevator to the lowest floor.

In terms of storeys, the building was also larger than the average. Manning counted twelve floors before the elevator stopped. As he stepped out, a voice asked him to walk through the house and into the garden.

It was then that he discovered that in one respect the house was smaller than he'd thought. From the street level it had seemed to be twice as long as the ordinary house; actually it was narrow, extending back the length of one room. Beyond that was the garden.

The garden was the biggest surprise of all. For a moment after stepping into it he could have sworn he was on the Achernarian planet. It was filled with the flowering shrubs and trees native to Achernar and the air was heavy with the scent of the blossoms. Above, it extended for the full twelve storeys. At the very top there was a transparent container in which there was a small nuclear machine creating subatomic energy. It was an exact duplicate of the Achernarian sun, built to scale so that the heat from it felt the same as if he had been standing under the real thing on Achernar. Although he could not look directly at it, its appearance seemed to be in perfect scale, too. Small artificial clouds floated lazily over the garden.

"Well, what do you want?" an irritable voice asked. This time there was no evidence of amplification, so he knew it was coming directly from the Ambassador. He looked around until he located the Achernarian stretched out in a sort of hammock beneath one of the trees.

ACHERNARIANS belong to the Hymenoptera order. That is to say that they are bees, in much the same sense that Terrans are primates. But quite different from any bees which Terrans had seen prior to space flight. The average Achernarian—and the Ambassador was considered an average political-type Achernarian*—was about two feet from end to end. He could walk upright or in the manner usually expected of insect life, being equipped with four feet, of which the two front feet could serve as an extra pair of hands when he chose to walk upright. What had once been the front feet, that is the third pair, had evolved into a pair of small hands with double thumbs, so that the Achernarians were the cleverest craftsmen in the Federation.

He still had wings although they were

* It is interesting to note that the type of Achernarian who went in for political life consisted of those who in a more primitive state would have been known as drones.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

no longer strong enough to support his body. He wore a robe which bore the same gold and brown markings as his body. It was difficult to tell when he was dressed and when he was not.

The advantages which evolution had granted the Achernarians had been accompanied by certain disadvantages. One had been a weakening of their many-faceted eyes, so that the Ambassador, like most of those from his planet, wore glasses. What had been gained in intelligence had been lost in physical strength; in spite of this, they were among the most ferocious of Federation citizens, the Achernarian soldiers wearing atomic-powered armor which made them almost invincible.

"Hello," Manning Draco said when he finally located the Ambassador. "May your day be filled with blossoms." It was a stock expression of politeness.

"It might be if I weren't interrupted so often," the Ambassador snapped. It was also normal for Achernarians to be irritable; if Seero Sna exceeded the norm it was a result of having been sent to Regulus. "What do you want, Terran?"

"I am here to observe the election," Manning said. "Consequently, I am interested in the fact that an Acruxian is the sole candidate for the Senate from here. I understand that this Dtilla Raishelle has called upon you."

"Yes."

"Why did he come to see you?"

"Because he's an idiot," the Ambassador said waspishly.* "On his first visit, he wanted to arrange a trade agreement with us. He seemed to be rather proud of a type of blossom grown on his home planet and thought he could sell them to us. He had a sample with him. It was horrible. I told him so. Nobody can match the quality of Achernarian blossoms."

"That's certainly true," Manning said. "What about his second and third visits?"

"Same thing," grumbled the Achernarian. "He kept insisting that we could learn to like their blossoms. I don't know when I've met anyone so dense."

"Why didn't you report his visits to the Federation?"

"Why should I? If I reported every idiot who approaches me, I'd get nothing else done."

"Didn't it occur to you that he might have been trying to get some other information out of you? Perhaps something inimical to the Federation or to Achernar?"

"Nonsense," snapped the Ambassador. "He was very nice. He was especially sympathetic to my position on this accursed planet. He'll probably make a very fine Senator."

"No doubt," Manning said dryly. "Did you happen to notice if he were carrying some sort of luggage? A rather large box, in fact."

THE Ambassador thought a moment, crushing a handful of blossoms and waving them near his face. "I believe he was carrying some sort of covered box."

"Covered?"

"Yes."

"You're sure?"

"Of course, I'm sure. I'm always sure. What's so important about a box?" He looked up at Manning with a shrewd expression in his eyes. "You think, perhaps, he's carrying around a ballot box which he'll switch for the official one on election day? If so, I trust you will remember that this is a practice which was started on Terra and, therefore, he could have learned none of the fine points of this art from me."

"I'll remember," Manning said, grinning. "By the way, don't you have any servants?"

"Certainly I have servants. Fifty of them, if you must know."

"Why don't they answer the door and conduct visitors to you?"

"Do you think I would endanger their lives?" demanded the Ambassador. "Do you realize that these Regulusians are

* It is believed that there was a strain of wasp somewhere in Seero-Sna's family line.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

barbarians? Why, they've always eaten my kind and we Achernarians are not fooled by their claim that they've given up this horrible practice. They should never have been admitted to the Federation and I'm warning you—you may report this to Terra—that my planet is fully prepared to protect its citizens. An act of aggression will not go unanswered."

"Sure," Manning said soothingly. "Say, do you have a visiscreen here?"

"Of course, I do. Do you think I'm a primitive? I'm tired of your questions, Terran. Go away. But don't forget to tell your Regulusian friends what I've said. Not a single act of aggression will go unanswered. Any attack on me, or my staff, will mean war."

"I'll tell them," Manning said. He turned and walked back across the garden.

"Be sure the door locks after you," the Achernarian called after him. "These Regulusian hoodlums would love to find me vulnerable."

Manning nodded and continued on his way without answering. He knew from experience that there was no point in arguing with an Achernarian. Once one of them got an idea, it took more than words to change it.

Out on the street again, he climbed into the car and asked the driver to take him to the spot where he and Xelia had come below the surface on the day before.

Again he had the driver wait and he took the elevator up to the kiosk. A moment later, he was in his ship.

First, he put through a visicall to his office on Terra. After finding out that business was going on as usual, he told his secretary some things he wanted her to send him immediately by carrier-jet. He turned on the receiver-beam in his ship and then put through a call to J. Barnaby Cruikshank over a tight-beam.

"Well, Manning, my boy," J. Barnaby said when the connection was made. "Everything all settled, eh? I knew you—"

"Everything isn't all settled," Manning interrupted. He quickly sketched in what he had learned, leaving out his guesses. He also left out any mention of Velmar Shonda.

"Then why are you wasting time calling me?" demanded J. Barnaby. "Don't you realize that tomorrow is election day? Get on the ball, boy."

"I want you on it with me," Manning said dryly. "There are a couple of little things I want you to do."

"What?"

"I suppose you want this Acruxian handled with soft gloves?"

"Absolutely," J. Barnaby said. "I don't care what you do to him, you understand, as long as nothing can be proved against us. But it's imperative that the government not be involved."

"Sure," Manning said. "I suppose it would be all right if I went to prison, or something like that, as long as you're in the clear. Some day, J. Barnaby, I'm going to let you stew in the juice you're always cooking up for me. . . . What if I can have the Acruxian arrested?"

"No," J. Barnaby said explosively. "Unless he's caught red-handed in the

Progress

Science may be here to stay,
But progress is the bunk—
We have invented poison gas
But cannot beat the skunk.

We fly the air so merrily,
But can't outwing the swallow—
We artificially inseminate,
That victory is hollow.

Inventions and discoveries,
Are merely roads to sorrow—
The atom bomb is here today,
And we'll be gone tomorrow.

—Alexander Samalman

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

commission of a very serious crime, he must not be arrested. It would have to be something so serious that the Acruxian government would have to refuse to recognize him. Any intent will not be enough."

"Okay, then. I want you to send a complete visicast crew here at once. They should be here in time to be set up and ready to make a Federation-wide visicast by eight tonight. Then you'll have to clear the time and see to it there are a number of spot announcements concerning a special visicast. We want as wide an audience as possible, especially on Achernar."

"I guess that can be done. But it better be worth it. There'll be hell to pay if all that preparation is made and nothing comes of it."

"Something will come of it," Manning promised. "Oh, another thing, J. Barnaby. You have any objections to me running for the Senate?"

"What? What kind of a hold-up is this? You know very well that the party has made all of its nominations long ago. The elections take place tomorrow—"

"Watch your blood pressure," Manning said with a grin. "I meant if I become a candidate for the Senate from Regulus."

"What about Xelia Zon?" J. Barnaby asked.

"He's no longer in the race. This is part of my plan."

J. Barnaby's face was still flushed with suspicion. "All right," he said. "But don't get any ideas—"

"How you talk," Manning said and cut the connection.

NEXT, he put in a call to Vega. He had her hold young Barnaby up to the screen and listened in delight to the gurgling sounds which seemed perfectly intelligible to him. Then he told her that he'd probably be home some time the following day.

"That'll be wonderful, darling," Vega said. "We miss you. . . . Manning?"

"Mmmm?"

"No girls?"

"No girls," he said, feeling a twinge of guilt about the Aldebaranese.

She blew him a kiss and the connection was broken.

Manning knew that he would have to wait almost two hours before the carrier-jet would arrive. He dug through his library and found an encyclotape in Aldebaran. He put it on and turned the switch, adjusting the tape so as to skip the physical description of the system.

". . . The people of Aldebaran Three are evolved from one of the two thousand known forms of the order of Chiroptera. Unlike those found in other parts of the Federation, however, they have become completely humanoid in the process of evolution. They have retained none of the physical characteristics of their order or genus, although many of their habits are still related to those of their primitive ancestors. It is believed that the Aldebaranese of the third planet are descended from the genus *Phyllostomatidae* since they are almost entirely fruit eaters. Judged by human standards, they are quite attractive, the females being especially beautiful. They seem to be sexually attracted to humans and other humanoid races and there are records of a number of mutually satisfactory unions. The Aldebaranese of the fourth planet are quite different in—"

Manning cut off the switch. He had been curious about Velmar Shonda, but she came from the third planet and there was no point in listening to the dry, academic description of her cousins on the other planets. He replaced the encyclotape with a musictape and settled back to wait for the carrier-jet.

VI

TWO hours later, a light glowed on the instrument panel of the *Alpha Actuary,* indicating that the carrier had come to rest in the receiver-lock. Manning waited a few minutes, then

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

opened the inner door to the lock. He opened the carrier and took the two small packages it contained. One was a completely sealed canister which buzzed when he held it up to his ear. The other was a large bouquet of flowers, fresh-sealed so that they would keep indefinitely.

Putting the two packages in a handpack, Manning left the ship and went back to the kiosk. When he reached the underground level, he ordered the driver back to the hotel.

There were two people waiting in the lobby for him. One of them was Velmar Shonda. Her yellow eyes lighted up at the sight of him.

"Manning," she exclaimed, coming to meet him. She put her hand over his and the touch of her fingers was enough to make a man forget his good intentions. "I came to ask you to take me to a party. Afterward, I thought we could drive out in the country. There's a wonderful little place I've found and I'd like to share it with you."

Manning was acutely aware of her nearness, of the warm scent washing over him. He was also aware of Xelia Zon waiting in the background and the memory of a voice saying, "No girls." A small part of him wanted to go with the Aldebaranese, while a greater part of him knew it would be trading larger happiness for a desire of the moment. He shook his head.

"Sorry, honey," he said, feeling as if he'd been saying nothing else. "Xelia Zon is waiting for me."

For a brief minute a new and harder expression crept into her golden eyes. "You're a strange man, Manning—" she said—"or a strong one."

"What do you mean?"

"I meant it as a challenge," she said provocatively.

When her meaning penetrated, Manning laughed. "I got news for you, sweetheart," he said, "but it'll have to wait. Run along now."

He watched the provocative swing of her hips as she walked away. Then he turned and joined Xelia Zon.

"You seem to be very popular," Xelia said dryly. "I, too, have been waiting for you. You have been busy?"

"I went up to the ship to call my wife." Manning grinned. "To assure her that I was resisting temptation. Now, I'd like to go talk to the Security officers who have been trailing Dtilla Raishelle."

Xelia Zon's tail twitched questioningly, but he said nothing as he led the way to his car. They drove directly to the Central Security offices, where Manning spent the next hour talking to the two officials who had followed the Acruxian since he landed on the planet. After considerable prodding, they did remember that his box had been covered each time he'd called on the Achernarian Ambassador. They couldn't remember having seen it covered at any other time.

WHEN they left Central Security, Manning asked Xelia to take him to the nearest Regulusian real estate office. After listening patiently to a long sales talk on the advantages of the better residential sections, Manning bought a house. He gave the agent a certified credit-draft and they left.

"How long," he asked Xelia, "will it be before the purchase of the house will be officially registered?"

"Probably within a few minutes. He'll make an official deposit of the transfer as quickly as he can for fear you'll change your mind—since he charged you about twenty per cent more than the property is worth. As soon as the deposit is made, the registry is flashed in all realty offices throughout the planet and you'll be recognized as a resident of Regulus. But why?"

"I want to become a candidate for the Regulusian Senate seat," Manning said. "How do I go about this?"

"Why?" asked the astonished Xelia. "Tomorrow is election day. Even if you could overcome my people's antipathy to Terrans, there isn't enough

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time to reach all the voters. You forget that we have no visicasting system."

"I could get enough votes if I were the only candidate."

"You're going to challenge Dtilla Raishelle?"

"Something like that," Manning admitted. "Actually, whether I'm elected or not is only a by-product. How do I become a candidate?"

"Well," Xelia said, "there are several ways. Let's see. . . ." He raised one hand to glance at the finger-time. "One method is to have a supporter declare your intention at any organized political meeting. There is one being held very shortly at the home of Brono Pia."

"Do you think Dtilla Raishelle will be there?"

"Probably. Brono Pia is one of his supporters. But—but, Manning, you can't be serious about this. You must know that no Terran has a chance against an Acruxian. Do you have a plan?"

"Of sorts," Manning said. "I think I know what is in Dtilla's precious box and it isn't perfume even though it smells. And I think I know his plan."

"What?"

"It's simply a matter of knowing the value of p to the k power," Manning said, grinning.* Obviously he was not going to say any more. "Now, let's go to the party. Will you be my supporter and declare my intentions?"

"All right," Xelia said glumly, turning his car around.

To Manning's unpracticed eye, the house to which they went looked exactly like the one they had gone to the day before. Again they were met by a butler who escorted them to an elevator and when they reached the lower floor they were met by another servant who led them to a garden with piped-in sunlight. There seemed to be the same crowd there, clustered in little groups. He caught a glimpse of Velmar Shonda, who interrupted her conversation to stare at him with her searching golden eyes, and at one end there was Dtilla Raishelle, surrounded by admiring Regulusians.

The Acruxian caught sight of them as they entered the garden and waved a tentacle in their direction. There was nothing in his manner to indicate that he had made an attempt to eliminate Manning and had failed.

"He seems to have taken last night's failure calmly," Xelia said, keeping his voice down. "You know, I was sure that he'd try again before this."

MANNING shook his head. "According to the encyclotape, Acruxian psychology doesn't work that way. They've very apt to make some clever attempt at assassination over the slightest suspicion that you're an enemy, but if that fails—and it doesn't very often—they believe it constitutes a judgment from their gods and then they sit back and wait for you to make the next move. When you do, they're usually more than ready and they seldom fail on the second try—which then proves that the gods have changed their mind. So Dtilla is waiting to see what I intend to do. If you'll go make the announcement, I'll stroll over and try to oblige him."

Leaving Xelia, Manning strolled across the garden, being sure to give wide berth to Velmar. He moved leisurely, trying to time his movements according to Xelia's progress.

"May your day be fulfilled," the Acruxian called out as Manning drew near.

"And yours," Manning returned politely. Glancing around, he saw Xelia and another Regulusian, who was obviously the host, going to a small stand in the garden. Manning thrust his way through the group that stood around Dtilla Raishelle. As he offered his hand,

* Manning Draco had arrived at his conclusions by applying the well-known Pascal and Fermat equation concerning probabilities. This, you will remember, runs:

$$p^k = \frac{n!}{(n-k)!\,k!}\, p^k\, q^{n-k}$$

For ordinary purposes, this equation is quite easy to use, but it is another matter to use it to discover the contents of a mysterious box and the purpose for which it is intended. Figuring $n!$ [not to mention $(n-k)$ and $k!$] is quite a chore even for Manning Draco.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he glanced down and made sure that the same box reposed on the ground beside the Acruxian.

Dtilla reached out and coiled a tentacle about Manning's hand. "It is a pleasure to meet a political observer so astute," he said. There was no doubt that he was referring to the night before. If there could have been he soon removed it. "I shall miss my little pet, but the gods have truly noted your greatness."

"Thanks," Manning said. Then, still holding Dtilla's tentacle, he kicked as hard as he could against the side of the box on the ground.*

Manning couldn't be certain, but it seemed to him that the box almost tipped over and that the tipping started even before his foot reached it. He also thought that the top of the box started to rise just before two of the Acruxian's tentacles clamped down on it. But whether he was right or not wasn't important; the reaction of Dtilla Raishelle was.

"*Dtona grooush!*" he shouted angrily. No one there could understand the shout, since it was not in Acruxian but in some obscure dialect, but it was obviously either a curse or a command. At the same moment, the tentacle which still held Manning's hand tightened in an almost bone-crushing grip. There was an expression of murderous anger in the eye stalks as they inclined toward Manning.

"You—" he began.

"Your attention please," another voice called out, interrupting the Acruxian. It was the Regulusian host and he seemed amused. "Our good friend, Xelia Zon, wishes to make a declaration of political importance. You will kindly give him your attention." He stepped down from the small stand and Xelia Zon took his place.

"My friends," said Xelia, "I have come before you this afternoon to place in nomination for the office of Regulusian Senator to the Assembly of Stars of the Federation the name of that stalwart son of Terra, that friend of the people, that intrepid defender of Regulusian rights—Manning Draco!"

"Hear, hear!" a number of Regulusians murmured politely.

"So," exclaimed Dtilla Raishelle, once more bending his angry eye stalks toward Manning, "not only have you insulted me in a more despicable fashion than I have ever been insulted before, but you also dare to oppose my election. It will give me great pleasure to challenge you to a duel which must be held before the election. You are challenged to meet me tonight in the central Arena."

"I accept," said Manning, disentangling his hand from the tentacle which still grasped it. "As the challenged party, I believe I have the right to name the method by which the duel will be fought."

"That is correct," the Acruxian said. He waved his tentacles angrily. "But understand, Terran, in regard to the political aspects of our duel, almost any of the legal tests of Regulus will do, but since a personal insult is also involved I warn you that the duel must be such as to satisfy my honor."

"I'll satisfy your honor," Manning said dryly. "I suggest a duel by tri-blast." He indicated the three-barrelled weapon in the holster attached to the Acruxian's skirt as the surrounding Regulusians gasped. "I trust you have a spare weapon with you so that I may be accommodated in the duel?"

"I have a spart tri-blast," Dtilla said. There was speculation mixed with the anger in his eyes.

"I trust this will satisfy your honor," Manning said formally.

"As you must know, the tri-blast is the best method of satisfying honor," Dtilla said. "Are you familiar with the weapon?"

"No, but I imagine I can become so. Sufficiently for the purpose. Shall we

* On Acrux, the supreme insult that can be offered an individual is to strike or in any way attack his personal property, since Acruxians consider material possessions immeasurably superior to the person.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

say at eight o'clock tonight?"

THE Acruxian nodded. Both the speculation and the anger had melted before the pleasure of his anticipation. It was evident in his eye stalks and the slight trembling of his tentacles. "That will be fine," he said. "You understand that should you survive, defeat still forces you to withdraw as a candidate?"

"Oh, I understand it," Manning said cheerfully. "Do you?" Without waiting for an answer, he turned on his heel and marched toward the house. Xelia joined him when he was about half way across the garden. Out of the corner of his eye, Manning saw Velmar Shonda leave the group she was with.

"Can you walk a little faster?" he said to Xelia in an undertone. "I don't feel up to facing that wench just now."

They reached the elevator ahead of her and as the door closed Manning saw that she was giving up the chase.

"Do you really intend to go through with this?" Xelia asked as they reached the street.

Manning nodded. "I was pretty sure earlier that I knew what Dtilla was up to," he said. "Now, I'm positive. I think this is about the only way to stop him safely."

"But do you know what you're getting into?" persisted Xelia. "If those blade-guns can amputate all three legs of an Acruxian at one shot, you can imagine what it will do to you. You don't even know how to use the weapon!"

"No, but I can learn tonight."

"Do you really think," Xelia asked in amazement, "that you can kill him or cripple him first?"

"I don't think anyone will be killed or crippled," Manning said lightly. "As near as I can understand, Acruxian honor is a very tricky affair, but there is one out. I'm going to time it to give Dtilla a chance to take that out and I think under the circumstances he will. Now, I want you to do a couple more things for me, if you will, Xelia."

"Of course. What?"

"There's a visicast crew on its way here. They'll probably land in the next hour or so. Will you meet them and help them to make any necessary arrangements so that the duel between Dtilla and myself can be visicast? Is there any way we can make sure of having a large crowd there tonight?"

"There are always large crowds at challenges. It'll be especially large tonight because of the nature of the duel. You can be sure that everyone will know about it.

"Good. Now, one more thing. Get in touch with your friend at Central Security and have him call off the two officers who have been trailing Dtilla."

"Why?"

"I'm sure Dtilla knows about them and I want him to feel particularly free tonight. Will you do it?"

"If you say so, Manning," Xelia said doubtfully. He looked as if he weren't sure that Manning hadn't blown a jet.

"No, I haven't gone crazy," Manning said, grinning. "You see, you Regulusians aren't the only ones who can read expressions. Now, run along. You can pick me up at the hotel in time for the duel."

"What are you going to do?" Xelia asked.

Manning grinned again. "I'm going to double-lock my door against visiting Aldebaranese females and get some rest."

VII

IT WAS a little before seven-thirty when Xelia Zon picked up Manning Draco. He assured him that the visicast crew was all set up in the Arena and everything was ready. They climbed into Xelia's car and drove to the Arena.

It was a huge place with a seating capacity of several hundred thousand.*

* Each seat in the Regulusian Arena was equipped with a viewer and a built-in receiver so that each individual could see and hear as if he were within a few feet of the contestants.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was already packed with Regulusians when Manning arrived. The center of the Arena, perhaps four or five hundred yards in diameter, was brilliantly lighted with the portable floods brought in by the visicast crew and the cameras were already focused and waiting for the signal from the emergency booth established in the first tier of seats.

Dtilla Raishelle, still carrying his large box, was already there, his green skirt bearing the ceremonial feathers worn by every Acruxian when dueling. He was not exactly pleased to learn that the duel was to be visicast over the Federation network, but there was nothing in the dueling code to prevent this and he accepted it with ill grace.

He carried his pair of tri-blasts in a handsome case and according to tradition offered Manning first choice. Manning carelessly took one of them and examined it until he was sure that he knew how it operated. Then he thrust it in his belt.

Taking the remaining blade gun, Dtilla Raishelle picked up his box and moved stolidly into the center of the Arena. Manning Draco waited until he caught a nod from the man in the emergency booth, then he picked up his small handpack and walked to the center of the Arena, stopping a few yards away from Dtilla. He knew that the visicast had already started and that an announcer in the booth was explaining the scene to the billions of viewers.

As soon as Manning reached the center of the space, Dtilla Raishelle placed his box on the ground. He lifted the tri-blast and saluted Manning, then began a complicated dance, his tentacles weaving. It was a performance dedicated to the Acruxian gods and preceded every Acruxian duel to death. Manning had heard it described on the encyclotape, but it was fascinating to see it. He knew it would last about three minutes and that no Acruxian could honorably kill or maim until the dance was finished. Once it was completed, however, there was no way an Acruxian could withdraw from a duel; until it was over there were a number of proscribed emergencies which would permit him to honorably quit the field.

Manning knew he had no more than about two and a half minutes in which to act—and he'd really be out of luck if his guess was wrong. Manning began a peculiar dancing motion of his own and suppressed a grin as he caught sight of the announcer's face in the emergency booth. Manning was doing a rough imitation of an ancient Terran tribal dance he had once seen on an ancestor-film. He knew that the announcer had been gaily explaining the ceremonial dance of the Acruxian, but was being completely baffled by the prancing of his fellow Terran.

He saw Dtilla glance curiously at him once, but that was all from him. Manning had gambled on the chance that the Acruxian had never before duelled a Terran and so would be willing to be-

Surprise, Surprise!

SCOTCH-DRINKING friend of ours tried Lord Calvert at our home, out of sheer politeness. "Egad!" he exclaimed. "It really IS good!" We know he meant it, because he ordered a case from the local store next day. And he's not *that* polite.

If you're a scholar and a judge of whiskeys, try some Lord Calvert soon. It costs a little more and tastes a little better, and we think you'll be pleasantly surprised. (Surprised, too, how little space a case of Lord Calvert takes up.)

Lord Calvert. Blended Whiskey. 86.8 Proof. 65% Grain Neutral Spirits. Calvert Dist. Corp., N. Y. C.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lieve that they too had ceremonial dances.

As he danced around, drawing ever nearer to the box on the ground, Manning Draco unfastened the opening of his hand-pack and took from it the fresh-sealed flowers. He broke the seal and began to strew the flowers around. Seemingly by accident, when he'd finished, the flowers formed a circle around the box that belonged to the Acruxian.

Manning removed the second package, broke the seal and threw it on the ground near the flowers. As it struck the ground, the canister split into two sections.

At that moment, Manning motioned to those in the booth and a super-spot was thrown on the circle of flowers as one of the overhead cameras swung in for a close-up. It was just in time to catch the sight of a number of tiny objects rising swiftly from the two halves of the canister. They hovered there a moment, then spread out and approached the flowers. The microphones picked up the steady buzzing sound.

Manning Draco cast aside the hand-pack as he moved backward. Then he drew the tri-blast and waited.

ALTHOUGH no one in the Arena, or among the billions viewing it at home, knew what was happening, a tense hush fell over them. There was such an air of suspense that the Acruxian felt it and faltered in his dance.

So slowly that at first no one believed it was happening the top half of the big box in the center of the flowers began swinging upward. The first one who was sure of what he saw was the Acruxian.

"*Dtona grooush,*" he shouted. He shouted something else in the same tongue; he had started to run toward the box, then halted as he realized that his dance had carried him too far away.

The top of the box continued to rise, slowly as though someone, or something, didn't want to attract attention.

Then the top was all the way up and there was a wind-like sound as thousands of Regulusians released their pent-up breath. Many light years away, other viewers tensed in front of their visiscreens.

What came out of the box was undoubtedly a bird, but unlike one ever seen in the Federation. From head to tail it was a good three feet long and, standing, it was about two feet tall. Its feathers were brown and white, with a black stripe running across its eyes like a mask. What had once been wings were now wing-like arms ending in a pair of three-fingered hands. There was an intelligent cruelty in its yellow eyes. A strange-looking harness was strapped around its body and in it there was a needle-sharp weapon.

As the bird came out of the box, it had eyes only for the small objects which buzzed around the flowers. Its head shot out again and again and each time its beak closed on one of the buzzing objects.

Manning Draco shouted and the bird glanced up. It looked at the man who stood before it and its beak yawned widely. There was a brief glimpse of a double row of teeth. Then it moved toward him, its eyes bright with intent. One hand crept toward the weapon in its harness.

Manning Draco fired the tri-blast. There was a sharp energy recoil and then the three blades struck the bird. It cried out something in the strange dialect the Acruxian had used and tried to dodge at the last moment, but it was too late. Feathers swirled in the air and then it went down, neatly sliced into four parts.

The cameras followed Manning Draco as he walked over to the dead bird and they moved in for a close-up. Off to one side, Dtilla Raishelle, reduced from co-star to extra, was ignored.

Manning scooped up one of the small objects, wincing slightly as it stung him. Then he held up the brown and gold bumblebee so that it could be seen.

"Citizens of the Federation," he said,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"the creature which I just killed in self defense was a Denebian, probably evolved from something very similar to the Terran Shrike, or Butcher Bird. Although the dominant form in their system, the Denebians are a completely ruthless life form, especially destructive towards all form of insects. This Denebian was brought to Regulus by an Acruxian agent and kept concealed in that box. During the past few days, the Denebian was permitted no food. It was planned to turn the Denebian loose in the Achernarian Embassy here, believing that inevitably the killing of the Achernarians would be blamed on the Regulusians and cause civil war in the Federation. This—"

SUDDENLY there was an interruption which Manning Draco had not planned. Velmar Shonda came running out into the Arena and threw her arms around Manning.

"My hero," she exclaimed. Her mouth pressed hotly against his.

Up in the emergency booth, the announcer quickly began an excited commentary on what they had just seen, while the cameras swung around to focus on the Acruxian. But he was no longer in the Arena.

In the meantime, with the aid of a couple of attendants, Manning succeeded in prying the Aldebaranese away from him. His mouth stung and wiping his hand across it, he discovered it was bleeding. Velmar Shonda had bitten his lip.

The announcer in his booth finished his comments and the visicast was switched back to the home studios where another announcer was ready to more clearly tie this incident in with the galactic situation.

"Visicast over," the directer shouted over the Arena audio system.

At that moment, a Vegan, in the uniform of the Federation Patrol, came running onto the field. As he neared them, there was a shrill scream from Velmar Shonda. She broke away from the attendants and started to run. But she didn't get far.

The Vegan patrolman drew a large-barrelled gun from his holster and fired. Velmar Shonda threshed around inside a force-net that held her prisoner.

"Boy," exclaimed the young patrolman, "am I glad I saw that!"

"Saw what?" Manning asked.

"I was on patrol just above this planet," the Vegan explained, "and I was watching the visicast from here when she ran out and attacked you. I blasted down and got here as fast as I could, but I don't mind admitting I was scared she'd get away."

"Attacked me?" Manning said. "I'm afraid you've made a mistake, officer. All she did was kiss me."

The Vegan shook his head. "Your lip is bleeding isn't it?" Manning nodded and the Patrolman went on: "It was an attack, sir. I know this one. She's Velmar Shonda from Aldebaran Four. We've been looking for her for two months."

Manning was dazed. "Did you say Aldebaran Four? She said she was from the third planet."

"She's from the fourth one, sir. Oh, they look a lot like the Aldebaranese on Three—except for the golden eyes. You can always tell them by that."

"But—but," stammered Manning, remembering, "the encyclotape said that the inhabitants on the fourth planet are very different . . ."

"They are—in their habits," the Patrolman said grimly. "This baby eats nothing but blood and she could drain you in about an hour."*

"If that's true," Xelia Zon said excitedly, "then that must account for

---

* As Manning would have learned if he hadn't been so impatient to turn off the encyclotape, the inhabitants of Aldebaran Four, while also belonging to the order of *Chiroptera*, are evolved from the genus *Desmodus rotundus*, vulgarly known on Terra as the Vampire Bat. They are exclusively blood eaters, preferring the blood of primates and in modern times having a special preference for the blood of humans. For this reason, their planet had been in strict quarantine, but Velmar Shonda had somehow escaped and hid out on Regulus. Having maintained the feeding habits of their primitive ancestors while they had physically evolved along humanoid lines, it was little wonder that the females like Velmar were known as Vampires in every sense of the word.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Regulusians who have been vanishing."

"If any of you have been vanishing," the Patrolman said, "then this baby is probably the reason for it. She's got a big appetite. Boy, am I glad I found her. Well—"

Another Regulusian came rushing up. "The Acruxian," he exclaimed. "He's escaped!"

"He can't get far," Xelia said grimly. "He didn't have a ship here. Unless he steals your ship, Manning."

"If he tried that he'd be in for a surprise," Manning said.

"An Acruxian?" the patrolman asked. "I saw one on the surface as I came in. There was another ship coming in from one of the satellites of Regulus. Come to think of it, it looked as if it might be under remote control."

"I thought he'd have a ship hidden somewhere," Manning said. "He's gone, then." He sounded cheerful.

"You want this Acruxian for something?" the patrolman asked.

"No," Manning said quickly before anyone else could answer.

"Okay. I'll be getting in with my prisoner. She ought to get me a promotion. And thanks, chum, for letting her bite your lip, so I could see her."

"Think nothing of it," Manning said, rubbing his lip, as the patrolman went away, dragging Velmar still in the force-net.

When it was all over, Manning realized that he was tired. He didn't feel like the trip back to Terra, so he went to the hotel and went to bed. He slept the sleep of the just and by the time he awakened the following morning, he was the duly elected Senator of Regulus. There was quite an official party to see him off.

VIII

IT WAS midday when Manning Draco landed back on Terra. He took an aircab to his pent-estate and went eagerly into the house. He wondered why Vega hadn't come to meet him, but then he thought she hadn't heard the cab arrive.

She was in the sun room. Manning bounded into the room and threw out his arms. "Hi, honey," he said.

She didn't answer.

"Hey," he said. "What's the matter? I'm home. Is there something wrong with Barnaby, or what?"

Vega finally consented to look up. "My hero!" she said scornfully.

Ouch! He'd forgotten that Velmar's capture hadn't been visicast; he'd even forgotten that Vega might have been watching the 'cast.

"Wait a minute," he said indignantly. "You got me all wrong. I couldn't stop her from running out and kissing me like that when I didn't even know she was coming. Besides, she wasn't kissing me—she was biting me."

"A big difference!"

"You bet it was. A Federal Patrolman arrived right afterwards to arrest her. She'd escaped from Aldebaran Four. Hey, don't you understand. She was a vampire from that quarantined planet. All she was out for was blood—not me."

"So you invited her up to your room to see your veins," Vega said. "Etchings—veins—what's the difference?"

"I got witnesses," Manning said desperately.

"I'll say you have," Vega said bitterly. "Billions of them. Do you know how many women called up to see if I'd been watching the visicast? And to think that I had to be holding little Barnaby up to look at the screen at that very moment."

"Look, honey, that dame—hell, you couldn't even call her a dame—was really dangerous. She was helping Dtilla Raishelle, but on the side she'd already helped herself to ten Regulusians. I was next on the list—"

Just then the door-announcer chimed. Before either of them could go to answer it, they heard the door open.

"Anybody home?" a voice called. It

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

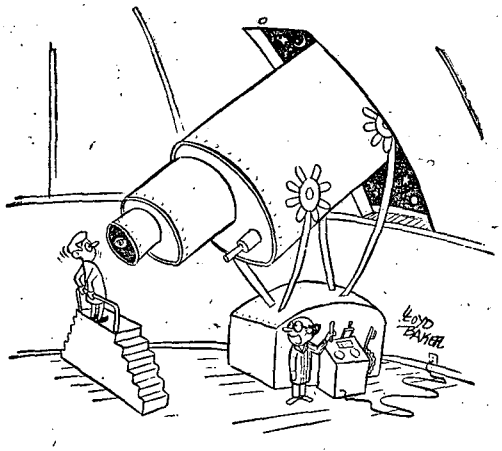
was J. Barnaby Cruikshank.

"Come in here," Manning yelled.

J. Barnaby appeared a moment later, his face beaming and his clothes looking so well-groomed he was hardly recognizable. "Manning, my boy," he said expansively, "you did it."

"I'll say he did," muttered Vega.

"You were magnificent," J. Barnaby continued before Manning could say anything. "I've read all the reports and you were never better. The way you reasoned that Dtilla Raishelle visited the Achernarian Ambassador three



"This new telescope will explode the theory about life on Mars once and for all"

times in order to familiarize himself with the lock so he'd have no trouble picking it when he returned to toss that Denebian inside—it was superb."

"J. Barnaby—" began Manning.

"And," interrupted J. Barnaby, "I will never know how you managed to figure out that the Acruxian was carrying a Denebian in that box, or how you knew the Denebian could see through the box. It was superlative!"

"Oh, it wasn't much," said Manning, caught off-guard for the moment. "I knew that the Acruxians had used Denebians before and the fact that Dtilla covered the box when he went to the Achernarian Embassy made it easy to guess the box was made with one-way-vision plastic. After that, it was only a matter of learning the value of *(n-k)!* and—to hell with *(n-k)*!! J. Barnaby, you've got—"

"My boy," interrupted J. Barnaby, "we owe you more than we can ever pay you. Not only did you handle the matter so that the Acruxians can't make any complaint, since Dtilla escaped, but the Achernarians were so impressed by the visicast that most of them voted for our party instead of their own. It was a Republocrat victory by a landslide."

"That's nice," Manning said hurriedly. "Now, will you tell—"

"I knew the minute I heard of the problem," J. Barnaby said expansively, "that Manning Draco was the boy who would soon have the situation well in hand."

"He had it well in hand, all right," Vega said.

"J. Barnaby," Manning said desperately, "you've got to tell Vega about that Aldebaranese. She refuses to believe me and—"

"All I know," J. Barnaby said blandly, "is what I seen on the visiscreen."

"Ha!" said Vega.

MANNING DRACO stared at his father-in-law in amazement. Then anger took over. "So," he said, "you owe me more than you can ever pay me, do you, you old, double-crossing Spican termite. I've put up with a lot from you, J. Barnaby Cruikshank, but I'll get you for this where it hurts if it's the last thing I do. I'm a member of the Senate now and when I take office I'm going to start a camapign to get a new Secretary of Planets."

"That's what I dropped in about," J. Barnaby said. "It seems that you are no longer a Senator."

"What?"

"My boy," J. Barnaby said paternally, "while you were on Regulus, you should have paid more attention to the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—er—sexual habits of the Regulusians."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Everything. Regulusians consider sex as a very serious game, sort of a battle of the sexes as it were, just as they do everything else. It is not a separate part of their lives. Therefore, a sexual challenge is judged just the same as any other challenge. It is known all over Regulus that this Aldebaranese—Velmar Shonda, or some such name—constantly challenged you in a sexual way and that you just as constantly refused to accept the challenge. Why, you even blatantly shoved her away from you in the Arena—calling on two attendants to help you in this unmasculine action—in full view of several hundred thousand Regulusians."

"What of it?" Manning demanded harshly.

"Unfortunately, my boy, as a result of refusing a challenge—you may recall the laws about a political candidate refusing challenges—your election was questioned. The Regulusian Lower Court—the highest in the land, by the way—ruled against you. They couldn't have done otherwise considering the evidence. Luckily, by the use of a little influence, we were able to have a good Republocrat, Xelia Zon, appointed to finish your term."

But neither Manning nor Vega heard his last sentence. They had turned to look at each other as they realized the meaning of what he was saying.

"Oh, darling," said Vega as she came into his arms, "I'm so sorry. How could I have ever doubted you?""

For once, Manning was smart. He didn't even try to answer that question. Instead, he bent his head and kissed her.

When they came up for air, several minutes later, neither of them spoke. They stared deeply into each other's eyes, then, moved by a common thought, they turned and walked in the direction of their bedroom.

They didn't even hear J. Barnaby Cruikshank chortling happily as he let himself out of the house.

How would you track down an underground agent who could change bodies whenever pursuit began breathing down his neck? How would you feel if you knew that such an enemy walked among you, invisible perhaps, in the body of your best friend?

?

Read the Exciting Answer in—

THE TRANSPOSED MAN

A Novel by **DWIGHT V. SWAIN**

•

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fishing Season

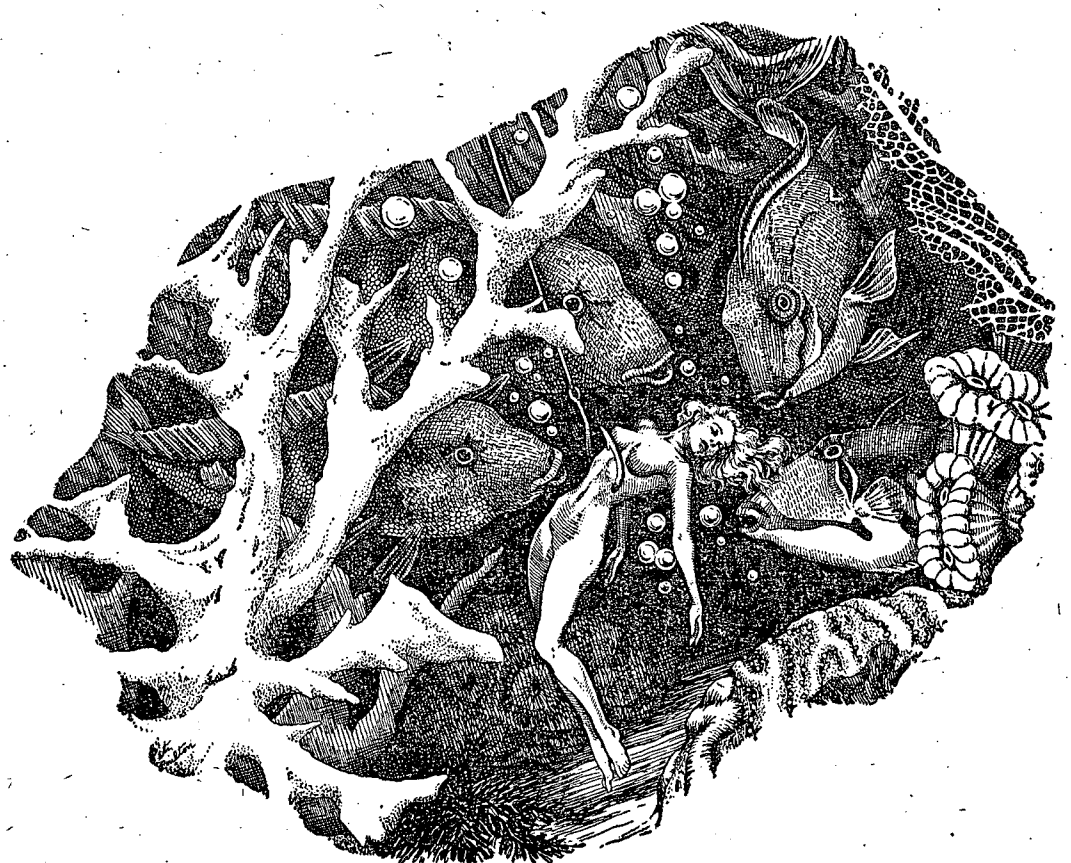
By ROBERT SHECKLEY

The psychiatrists couldn't explain what was happening — but applied piscatology could

THEY had been living in the housing project only a week, and this was their first invitation. They arrived on the dot of eight-thirty. The Carmichaels were obviously prepared for them, for the porch light was on, the front door partially open, and the living room a blaze of light.

"Do I look all right?" Phyllis asked at the door. "Seams straight, hair curly?"

"You're a vision in a red hat," her husband assured her. "Just don't spoil the effect by leading aces." She made a small face at him and rang the doorbell. Soft chimes sounded inside.



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mallen straightened his tie while they waited. He pulled out his breast handkerchief a microscopic fraction further.

"They must be making gin in the subcellar," he told his wife. "Shall I ring again?"

"No—wait a moment." They waited, and he rang again. Again the chimes sounded.

"That's very strange," Phyllis said a few minutes later. "It was for tonight, wasn't it?" Her husband nodded. The Carmichaels had left their windows open to the warm spring weather. Through the Venetian blinds they could see a table set for bridge, chairs drawn up, candy dishes out, everything in readiness. But no one answered the door.

"Could they have stepped out?" Phyllis Mallen asked. Her husband walked quickly across the lawn to the driveway.

"Their car's in." He came back and pushed the front door further open.

"Jimmy—don't go in."

"I'm not." He put his head in the door. "Hello! Anybody home?"

Silence in the house.

"Hello!" he shouted, and listened intently. He could hear Friday-night noises next-door—people talking, laughing. A car passed in the street. He listened. A board creaked, somewhere in the house, then silence again.

"They wouldn't go away and leave their house open like this," he told Phyllis. "Something might have happened." He stepped inside. She followed, but stood uncertainly in the living room while he went into the kitchen. She heard him open the cellar door, call out, "Anyone home?" And close it again. He came back to the living room, frowned, and went upstairs.

In a little while Mallen came down with a puzzled expression on his face. "There's no one there," he said.

"Let's get out of here," Phyllis said, suddenly nervous in the bright, empty house. They debated leaving a note, decided against it, and started down the walk.

"Shouldn't we close the front door?" Jim Mallen asked, stopping.

"What good will it do? All the windows are open."

"Still—" He went back and closed it. They walked home slowly, looking back over their shoulders at the house. Mallen half-expected the Carmichaels to come running after them, shouting, "Surprise!"

But the bright house remained silent.

THEIR home was only a block away, a brick bungalow just like two hundred others in the development. Inside, Mr. Carter was making artificial trout flies on the card table. Working slowly and surely, his deft fingers guided the colored threads with loving care. He was so intent on his work that he didn't hear the Mallens enter.

"We're home, dad," Phyllis said.

"Ah," Mr. Carter murmured. "Look at this beauty." He held up a finished fly. It was an almost exact replica of a hornet. The hook was cleverly concealed by overhanging yellow and black threads.

"The Carmichaels were out—we think," Mallen said, hanging up his jacket.

"I'm going to try Old Creek in the morning," Mr. Carter said. "Something tells me the elusive trout may be there." Mallen grinned to himself. It was difficult talking with Phyllis' father. Nowadays he never discussed anything except fishing. The old man had retired from a highly successful business on his seventieth birthday to devote himself wholeheartedly to his favorite sport.

Now, nearing eighty, Mr. Carter looked wonderful. It was amazing, Mallen thought. His skin was rosy, his eyes clear and untroubled, his pure white hair neatly combed back. He was in full possession of his senses, too—as long as you talked about fishing.

"Let's have a snack," Phyllis said. Regretfully she took off the red hat, smoothed out the veil and put it down on a coffee table. Mr. Carter added an-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other thread to his trout fly, examined it closely, then put it down and followed them into the kitchen.

While Phyllis made coffee, Mallen told the old man what had happened. Mr. Carter's answer was typical.

"Try some fishing tomorrow and get it off your mind. Fishing, Jim, is more than a sport. Fishing is a way of life, and a philosophy as well. I like to find a quiet pool, and sit on the banks of it. I figure, if there's fish anywhere, they might as well be there."

Phyllis smiled, watching Jim twist uncomfortably on his chair. There was no stopping her father, once he got started. And anything would start him.

"Consider," Mr. Carter went on, "A young executive. Someone like yourself, Jim—dashing through a hall. Common enough? But at the end of the last long corridor is a trout stream. Consider a politician. You certainly see enough of them in Albany. Briefcase in hand. worried—"

"That's strange," Phyllis said, stopping her father in mid-flight. She was holding an unopened bottle of milk in her hand.

"Look." Their milk came from *Stannerton Dairies*. The green label on this bottle read: *Stanneron Daries*.

"And look." She pointed. Under that, it read: *lisensed by the neW yoRk Bord of healthh*. It looked like a clumsy imitation of the legitimate label.

"Where did you get this?" Mallen asked.

"Why, I suppose from Mr. Elger's store. Could it be an advertising stunt?"

"I despise the man who would fish with a worm," Mr. Carter intoned gravely. "A fly—a fly is a work of art. But the man who'd use a worm would rob orphans and burn churches."

"Don't drink it," Mallen said. "Let's look over the rest of the food."

There were three more counterfeited items. A candy bar which purported to be a Mello-Bite had an orange label instead of the familiar crimson. There was a jar of *Amerrican ChEEse*, almost a third larger than the usual jars of that brand, and a bottle of *SPArkling Watr*.

"That's very odd," Mallen said, rubbing his jaw.

"I always throw the little one back," Mr. Carter said. "It's not sporting to keep them, and that's part of a fisherman's code. Let them grow, let them ripen, let them gain experience. It's the old, crafty ones I want, the ones who skulk under logs, who dart away at the first sight of the angler. Those are the lads who put up a fight!"

"I'm going to take this stuff back to Elger," Mallen said, putting the items into a paper bag. "If you see anything else like it, save it."

"Old Creek is the place," Mr. Carter said. "That's where they hide out."

SATURDAY morning was bright and beautiful. Mr. Carter ate an early breakfast and left for Old Creek, stepping lightly as a boy, his battered fly-decked hat set at a jaunty angle. Jim Mallen finished coffee and went over to the Carmichael house.

The car was still in the garage. The windows were still open, the bridge table set, and every light was on, exactly as it had been the night before. It reminded Mallen of a story he had read once about a ship under full sail, with everything in order—but not a soul on board.

"I wonder if there's anyone we can call?" Phyllis asked when he returned home. "I'm sure there's something wrong."

"Sure. But who?" They were strangers in the project. They had a nodding acquaintance with three or four families, but no idea who might know the Carmichaels.

The problem was settled by the ringing of the telephone.

"If it's anyone from around here," Jim said as Phyllis answered it, "Ask them."

"Hello?"

"Hello. I don't believe you know me.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'm Marian Carpenter, from down the block. I was just wondering—has my husband dropped over there?" The metallic telephone voice managed to convey worry, fear.

"Why, no. No one's been in this morning."

"I see." The thin voice hesitated.

"Is there anything I can do?" Phyllis asked.

"I don't understand it," Mrs. Carpenter said. "George—my husband—had breakfast with me this morning. Then he went upstairs for his jacket. That was the last I saw of him."

"Oh—"

"I'm sure he didn't come back downstairs. I went up to see what was holding him—we were going for a drive—and he wasn't there. I searched the whole house. I thought he might be playing a practical joke, although George never joked in his life—so I looked under beds and in the closets. Then I looked in the cellar, and I asked next door, but no one's seen him. I thought he might have visited you—he was speaking about it—"

Phyllis explained to her about the Carmichaels' disappearance. They talked for a few seconds longer, then hung up.

"Jim," Phyllis said, "I don't like it. You'd better tell the police about the Carmichaels."

"We'll look pretty foolish when they turn up visiting friends in Albany."

"We'll have to chance it."

Jim found the number and dialed, but the line was busy.

"I'll go down."

"And take this stuff with you." She handed him the paper bag.

POLICE-CAPTAIN LESNER was a patient, ruddy-faced man who had been listening to an unending stream of complaints all night and most of the morning. His patrolmen were tired, his sergeants were tired, and he was the tiredest of all. Nevertheless, he ushered Mr. Mallen into his office and listened to his story.

"I want you to write down everything you've told me," Lesner said when he was through. "We got a call on the Carmichaels from a neighbor late last night. Been trying to locate them. Counting Mrs. Carpenter's husband that makes ten in two days."

"Ten what?"

"Disappearances."

"My Lord," Mallen breathed softly. He shifted the paper bag. "All from this town?"

"Every one," Captain Lesner said harshly, "from the Vainsville housing project in this town. As a matter of fact, from four square blocks in that project." He named the streets.

"I live in there," Mallen said.

"So do I."

"Have you any idea who the—the kidnapper could be?" Mallen asked.

"We don't think it's a kidnapper," Lesner said, lighting his twentieth cigarette for the day. "No ransom notes. No selection. A good many of the missing persons wouldn't be worth a nickel to a kidnapper. And wholesale like that—not a chance!"

"A maniac then?"

"Sure. But how has he grabbed whole families? Or grown men, big as you? And where has he hidden them, or their bodies?" Lesner ground out the cigarette viciously. "I've got men searching every inch of this town. Every cop within twenty miles of here is looking. The state police are stopping cars. And we haven't found a thing."

"Oh, and here's something else." Mallen showed him the counterfeited items.

"Again, I don't know," Captain Lesner confessed sourly. "I haven't had much time for this stuff. We've had other complaints—" The telephone rang, but Lesner ignored it.

"It looks like a black market scheme. I've sent some stuff like it to Albany for analysis. I'm trying to trace outlets. Might be foreign. As a matter of fact, the F.B.I. might—damn that 'phone!"

He yanked it out of its cradle.

"Lesner speaking. Yes . . . yes. You're

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sure? Of course, Mary. I'll be right over." He hung up. His red face was suddenly drained of color.

"That was my wife's sister," he announced. "My wife's missing!"

Mallen drove home at breakneck speed. He slammed on the brakes, almost cracking his head against the windshield, and ran into the house.

"Phyllis!" he shouted. Where was she? Oh God, he thought. If she's gone—

"Anything wrong?" Phyllis asked, coming out of the kitchen.

"I thought—" He grabbed her and hugged until she squealed.

"Really," she said, smiling. "We're not newlyweds. Why, we've been married a whole year and a half—"

He told her what he'd found out in the police station.

Phyllis looked around the living room. It had seemed so warm and cheerful a week ago. Now, a shadow under the couch frightened her; an open closet door was something to shudder at. She knew it would never be the same.

There was a knock at the door.

"Don't go," Phyllis said.

"Who's there?" Mallen asked.

"Joe Dutton, from down the block. I suppose you've heard the news?"

"Yes," Mallen said, standing beside the closed door.

"We're barricading the streets," Dutton said. "Going to look over anyone going in or out. We're going to put a stop to this, even if the police can't. Want to join us?"

"You bet," Mallen said, and opened the door. The short, swarthy man on the other side was wearing an old army jacket. He was gripping a two foot chunk of wood.

"We're going to cover these blocks like a blanket," Dutton said. "If anyone else is grabbed it'll have to be underground." Mallen kissed his wife and joined him.

THAT afternoon there was a mass meeting in the school auditorium. Everyone from the affected blocks was there, and as many of the townspeople as could crowd in. The first thing they found out was that, in spite of the blockades, three more people were missing from the Vainsville project.

Captain Lesner spoke, and told them that he had called Albany for help. Special officers were on their way down, and the F.B.I. was coming in on it, too. He stated frankly that he didn't know what or who was doing it, or why. He couldn't even figure out why all the missing were from one part of the Vainsville project.

He had gotten word from Albany about the counterfeited food that seemed to be scattered all over the project. The examining chemists could detect no trace of any toxic agent. That seemed to explode a recent theory that the food had been used to drug people, making them walk out of their homes to whatever was taking them. However, he cautioned everyone not to eat it. You could never tell.

The companies whose labels had been impersonated had disclaimed any knowledge. They were prepared to bring suit against anyone infringing on their copyrights.

The mayor spoke, in a series of well-intentioned platitudes, counselling them to be of good heart; the civic authorities were taking the whole situation in hand.

Of course, the mayor didn't live in the Vainsville project.

The meeting broke up, and the men returned to the barricades. They started looking for firewood for the evening, but it was unnecessary. Help arrived from Albany, a cavalcade of men and equipment. The four square blocks were surrounded by armed guards. Portable searchlights were set up, and the area declared under an eight o'clock curfew.

Mr. Carter missed all the excitement. He had been fishing all day. At sunset he returned, empty-handed but happy. The guards let him through, and he walked into the house.

"A beautiful fishing day," he declared.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Mallens spent a terrible night, fully clothed, dozing in snatches, looking at the searchlights playing against their windows and hearing the tramp of armed guards.

Eight o'clock Sunday morning—two more people missing. Gone from four blocks more closely guarded than a concentration camp.

At ten o'clock Mr. Carter, brushing aside the objections of the Mallens, shouldered his fishing kit and left. He hadn't missed a day since April thirtieth, and wasn't planning on missing one all season.

Sunday noon—another person gone, bringing the total up to sixteen.

Sunday, one o'clock—all the missing children were found!

A police car found them on a road near the outskirts of town, eight of them, including the Carmichael boy, walking dazedly toward their homes. They were rushed to a hospital.

There was no trace of the missing adults, though.

Word of mouth spread the news faster than the newspapers or radio could. The children were completely unharmed. Under examination by psychiatrists it was found that they didn't remember where they had been or how they had been taken there. All the psychiatrists could piece together was a sensation of flying, accompanied by a sickness to the stomach. The children were kept in the hospital for safety, under guard.

But between noon and evening, another child disappeared from Vainsville.

JUST before sunset, Mr. Carter came home. In his knapsack were two big rainbow trout. He greeted the Mallens gaily and went to the garage to clean his fish.

Jim Mallen stepped into the backyard and started to the garage after him, frowning. He wanted to ask the old man about something he had said a day or two ago. He couldn't quite remember what it was, but it seemed important.

His next door neighbor, whose name he couldn't remember, greeted him.

"Mallen," he said. "I think I know."

"What?" Mallen asked.

"Have you examined the theories?" the neighbor asked.

"Of course." His neighbor was a skinny fellow in shirtsleeves and vest. His bald head glistened red in the sunset.

"Then listen. It can't be a kidnapper. No sense in their methods. Right?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And a maniac is out. How could he snatch fifteen, sixteen people? And return the children? Even a gang of maniacs couldn't do that, not with the number of cops we've got watching. Right?"

"Go on." Out of the corner of his eye Mallen saw his neighbor's fat wife come down the back steps. She walked over to them and listened.

"The same goes for a gang of criminals, or even Martians. Impossible to do it, and no reason even if they could. We've got to look for something *illogical*—and that leaves just one logical answer."

Mallen waited, and glanced at the woman. She was looking at him, arms folded across her aproned chest. In fact, she was glaring at him. Can she be angry at me, Mallen thought. What have I done?

"The only answer," his neighbor said slowly, "Is that there is a hole somewhere around here. A hole in the space-time continuum."

"What!" blurted Mallen. "I don't quite follow that."

"A hole in time," the bald neighbor explained, "or a hole in space. Or in both. Don't ask me how it got there; it's there. What happens is, a person steps into that hole, and bingo! He's somewhere else. Or in some other time. Or both. This hole can't be seen, of course—it's fourth dimensional—but it's there. The way I see it, if you traced the movements of those people, you'd find every one of them passed through a certain spot—and vanished.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hmmm." Mallen thought it over. "That sounds interesting—but we know that lots of people vanished right out of their own homes."

"Yeah," the neighbor agreed. "Let me think— I know! The hole in space-time isn't fixed. It drifts, moves around. First it's in Carpenter's house, then it moves on, aimlessly—"

"Why doesn't it move out of these four blocks?" Mallen asked, wondering why the man's wife was still glaring at him, her lips tightly compressed.

"Well," the neighbor said, "It has to have some limitations."

"And why were the children returned?"

"Oh for heaven's sake, Mallen, you can't ask me to figure out every little thing, can you? It's a good working theory. We'll have to have more facts before we can work out the whole thing."

"Hello there!" Mr. Carter called, emerging from the garage. He held up two beautiful trout, neatly cleaned and washed.

"The trout is a gamey fighter, and makes magnificent eating as well. The most excellent of sports, and the most excellent of foods!" He walked unhurriedly into the house.

"I've got a better theory," the neighbor's wife said, unfolding her arms and placing her hands on her ample hips.

Both men turned to look at her.

"Who is the only person around here who isn't the least bit worried about what's going on? Who goes walking all over with a bag he *says* has *fish* in it? Who *says* he spends all his time fishing?"

"Oh, no," Mallen said. "Not Dad Carter. He has a whole philosophy about fishing—"

"I don't care about philosophy!" the woman shrieked. "He fools you, but he doesn't fool me! I only know he's the only man in this neighborhood who isn't the least bit worried and he's around and gone every day and lynching would probably be too good for him!" With that she spun and went wadding into her house.

"Look, Mallen," the bald neighbor said. "I'm sorry. You know how women are. She's upset, even if Danny is safe in the hospital."

"Sure," Mallen said.

"She doesn't understand the space-time continuum," he went on earnestly. "But I'll explain it to her tonight. She'll apologize in the morning. You'll see."

The men shook hands and returned to their respective homes.

DARKNESS came swiftly, and searchlights went on all over town. Beams of light knifed down streets, into backyards, reflected from closed windows. The inhabitants of Vainsville settled down to wait for more disappearances.

Jim Mallen wished he could put his hands on whatever was doing it. Just for a second—that was all he'd need. But to have to sit and wait. He felt so helpless. His wife's lips were pale and cracked, and her eyes were tired. But Mr. Carter was cheerful, as usual. He fried the trout over a gas burner, serving both of them.

"I found a beautiful quiet pool today," Mr. Carter announced. "It is near the mouth of Old Creek, up a little tributary. I fished there all day, leaning back against the grassy bank and watching the clouds. Fantastic things, clouds! I shall go there tomorrow, and fish in it one more day. Then I will move on. A wise fisherman does not fish out a stream. Moderation is the code of the fisherman. Take a little, leave a little. I have often thought—"

"Oh Dad, please!" Phyllis screamed, and burst into tears. Mr. Carter shook his head sadly, smiled an understanding smile and finished his trout. Then he went into the living room to work on a new fly.

Exhausted, the Mallens went to bed. . . .

Mallen awoke and sat upright. He looked over and saw his wife, asleep

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beside him. The luminous dial of his watch read four-fifty-eight. Almost morning, he thought.

He got out of bed, slipped on a bathrobe and padded softly downstairs. The searchlights were flashing against the living-room window, and he could see a guard outside.

That was a reassuring sight, he thought, and went into the kitchen. Moving quietly, he poured a glass of milk. There was fresh cake on top of the refrigerator, and he cut himself a slice.

Kidnappers, he thought. Maniacs. Men from Mars. Holes in space. Or any combination thereof. No, that was wrong. He wished he could remember what he wanted to ask Mr. Carter. It was important.

He rinsed out the glass, put the cake back on the refrigerator and walked to the living room. Suddenly he was thrown violently to one side.

Something had hold of him! He flailed out, but there was nothing to hit. Something was gripping him like an ironhand, dragging him off his feet. He threw himself to one side, scrambling for a footing. His feet left the floor and he hung for a moment, kicking and squirming. The grip around his ribs was so tight he couldn't breath, couldn't make a sound. Inexorably, he was being lifted.

Hole in space, he thought, and tried to scream. His wildly flailed arms caught a corner of the couch and he seized it. The couch was lifted with him. He yanked, and the grip relaxed for a moment, letting him drop to the floor.

He scrambled across the floor toward the door. The grip caught him again, but he was near a radiator. He wrapped both arms around it, trying to resist the pull. He yanked again, and managed to get one leg around, then the other.

The radiator creaked horribly as the pull increased. Mallen felt as though his waist would part, but he held on, every muscle stretched to the breaking point. Suddenly the grip relaxed completely.

He collapsed to the floor.

WHEN he came to it was broad daylight. Phyllis was splashing water in his face, her lower lip caught between her teeth. He blinked, and wondered for a moment where he was.

"Am I still here?" he asked.

"Are you all right?" Phyllis demanded. "What happened? Oh, darling! Let's get out of this place—"

"Where's your father?" Mallen asked groggily, getting to his feet.

"Fishing. Now please, sit down. I'm going to call a doctor."

No. Wait." Mallen went into the kitchen. On the refrigerator was the cake box. It read: *Johnson's Cake Shop. Vainsville, New YorK.* A capital K on New York. Really a very small error.

And Mr. Carter? Was the answer there? Mallen raced upstairs and dressed. He crumpled the cakebox and thrust it into his pocket, and hurried out the door.

"Don't touch anything until I get back!" he shouted at Phyllis. She watched him get into the car and race down the street. Trying hard to keep from crying, she walked into the kitchen.

Mallen was at Old Creek in fifteen minutes. He parked the car and started walking up the stream.

"Mr. Carter!" he shouted as he went. "Mr. Carter!"

He walked and shouted for half an hour, into deeper and deeper woods. The trees overhung the stream now, and he had to wade to make any speed at all. He increased his pace, splashing, slipping on stones, trying to run.

"Mr. Carter!"

"Hello!" He hear dthe old man's voice. He followed the sound, up a branch of the stream. There was Mr. Carter, sitting on the steep bank of a little pool, holding his long bamboo pole. Mallen scrambled up beside him.

"Take it easy, son," Mr. Carter said. "Glad you took my advice about fishing."

"No," Mallen panted. "I want you to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tell me something."

"Gladly," the old man said. "What would you like to know?"

"A fisherman wouldn't fish out a pool completely, would he?"

"I wouldn't. But some might."

"And bait. Any good fisherman would use artificial bait?"

"I pride myself on my flies," Mr. Carter said. "I try to approximate the real thing. Here, for example, is a beautiful replica of a hornet." He plucked a yellow hook from his hat. "And here is a lovely mosquito."

Suddenly his line stirred. Easily, surely, the old man brought it in. He caught the gasping trout in his hand and showed him to Mallen.

"A little fellow—I won't keep him." He removed the hook gently, easing it out of the gasping gill, and placed the fish back in water.

"When you throw him back—do you think he knows? Does he tell the others?"

"Oh, no," Mr. Carter said. "The experience doesn't teach him anything. I've had the same young fish bite my line two or three times. They have to grow up a bit before they know."

"I thought so." Mallen looked at the old man. Mr. Carter was unaware of the world around him, untouched by the terror that had struck Vainsville.

Fishermen live in a world of their own, thought Mallen.

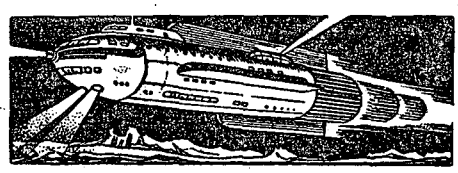
"But you should have been here an hour ago," Mr. Carter said. "I hooked a beauty. A magnificent fellow, two pounds if he was an ounce. What a battle for an old warhorse like me! And he got away. But there'll come another— hey, where are you going?"

"Back!" Mallen shouted, splashing into the stream. He knew now what he had been looking for in Mr. Carter. A parallel. And now it was clear.

Harmless Mr. Carter, pulling up his trout, just like that other, greater fisherman, pulling up his—

"Back to warn the other fish!" Mallen shouted over his shoulder, stumbling along the stream bed. If only Phyllis hadn't touched any food! He pulled the cake box out of his pocket and threw it from him as hard as he could. The hateful lure!

While the fishermen, each in his respective sphere, smiled and dropped their lines into the water again.



Read the Gala August Issue of

STARTLING STORIES

●

Featuring

JOURNEY TO MISENUM, a Novel by SAM MERWIN, Jr.

THE WAGES OF SYNERGY, by THEODORE STURGEON

●

ON SALE EVERYWHERE — 25c AT ALL STANDS!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SIBLING

By Leslie Waltham

Maun could anticipate her every wish—save one. . . .

ANDRO, First Liaison Officer of the Third Planet, floated homeward with his wife's "present" beside him. His boat, pulled by an underwater sunburst of luminous fish, befitted a man of importance, a man of prestige and position. He glided past the milk-glass city where the old ones rocked and crooned before memory pools, where sticky huddles of children listened to the lyre-flowers, and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where the glances of silver-eyed men and women examined, and met—and held fast. He drifted to his home on the ledge of a mountain, where he was met by his wife with her plain, good face. And she looked at the "present," who stood behind him, and shivered. . . .

MYA, the Earth One, rose as her companion prepared to go. She glanced at the valley below. Fingers of twilight inquired into its sands for the first, soft dying of day.

"It's simply too glorious, isn't it?" Her guest's voice clawed at irritation.

"I suppose so," she shrugged. The sleepy perfumes of the lagoon offered her its feather boats—curling, amber-crusted reminders of lost autumn leaves at home. The mountain, ripped from a vortex of sky, was kindling its transparent crags with an inner glow. Like cracked ice in a cool glass, she thought, and her fingertips reached for the forgotten chill.

Why did she hate it so? This washed, blue world that had mothered Maun, and perhaps others made of the same substance?

"Goodness, my dear! How can you look at that marvelous scenery and be so luke-warmish?"

"I don't know." Her face turned skyward. "It's up there I think. We've been here six Earth-months and haven't had one glimpse of the sun." The churning clouds sucked upon themselves in answer.

"And you never will," her comrade chirped. "That's Venus for you. But you knew that, darling, when you came."

"Only the words. The words, I knew. But the feeling waits for you outside the words."

The other woman laughed, plucking daintily for her wrap. "You *are* in a fret today, Mya."

"Those clouds must go from here to the day after eternity. I sometimes wonder if the sun is still out there."

"Well really, dear girl! To hear you talk, a person would think this was a very trying place, instead of a perfectly exquisite planet. In spite of a ten-day rotation period—"

"That too," sighed Mya. "That too. I remember when I was a little girl and my nurse made me nap in the daytime. I thought she was always there, watching me from some place I didn't know about. I feel that way during the sleep periods here."

Somewhere a wind-clock breathed its warning of the time.

"Gracious!" the guest started. "I didn't realize how long I've been here."

"Yes."

"And your poor baby! I'd forgotten about Dikki! He must be ravenous."

"I'll feed him right away."

"How is the little angel?"

"Eats like a horse, sleeps like a rock."

"How healthy of him!" She fluttered again over her misplaced wrap. "Which is more than I can say for you, pet. Has Andro been taking care of you?"

"Just marvelous care."

"Dear Andro."

Mya would not look at her. "Yes, dear Andro."

"Well, I must be toddling. Now where *did* I put my stole?"

AS SHE spoke, the portal mists billowed and shifted to produce a striking creature. A perfect, silver replica of Mya. Flowing in cords of reflected light to her mistress, the creature bowed.

"I do your command, Oh, Earth One."

The breathing at Mya's side caught in amazement. "What in Heaven's name—?" Her question was chopped short by Mya's hand.

As a mist rising, so the servant delivered the misplaced stole into astonished hands, and, sprinkling a few drops of dissolving liquid over the half-eaten wine-fruit, disappeared across the hazy threshold.

"Well! *Who* was that?"

"That was Maun." Mya's eyes sought a point beyond her companion's head, a distance she seemed to prefer.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But—*what* was that?"

"That was—" She had difficulty in focusing on it. "That was only God knows what. She was sent to me by the Elders-of-Venus as a mark of respect for Andro."

"But how did she know I couldn't find . . .?"

"I told her."

"But you haven't been near the house."

"My mind. I told her with my mind."

Eyebrows lifted ecstatically. "Is she telepathic?"

"I suppose you'd call it that. I think of something—sometimes I do no more than graze the thought, and like a genie from some dead lamp, Maun does it."

"The minute you think of it?"

"If I don't specify any particular time. But she has a delaying mechanism, and I can think it for tomorrow or next week or next year. It doesn't matter."

"But how cunning!"

"You think so?" It didn't sound like a question.

"Of course, darling."

Suddenly, Mya stood fist high in anger. "Well, it isn't!" she cried. "What do you think it's like having everything taken away from you? *You* try running like a fool every time you think of something you'd like to do."

"Mya, you shouldn't talk that way!"

"Sorry." Her smile twisted the silence. "But there are some things I'd like to do for myself. I might even like to take care of my own son."

"How perfectly amazing!" The woman was aghast. "Here you have this lamb of a servant—"

"Who has me completely trapped. Just thinking of anything sets her off. I don't have anything left to do."

"Well, counteract the order, my sweet. That's easy enough. Tell her you've changed your mind."

"I can't! That's just it! She's a positive mechanism and can't be reversed."

The visitor's face convulsed in concern. "Mya, I said you didn't look well. You've just been overdoing, that's all, and . . ."

"I've just been—" Mya had to be rid of this garrulous woman immediately.

Grasping one fat elbow, she steered expertly. Past the chiding of the shrubbery. "Just a perfect treasure. . . ." Through the soughing of sands. "Imagine a servant as divine as that. . . ." Into a waiting boat.

The tiny bark bestrode the wind. Her visitor's words washed over Mya, blue-scented and faint.

"I only wish *I* had her. . . ."

"I only wish you did too," she said to no one in particular.

THOUGHTS of Dikki carried her back into the house. Dikki. Her tiny, scrubbed morsel! Her beloved, pink tyrant. Maybe Maun wouldn't be there. Only she would be, of course.

Mya's son strode imperially across his crib, knee deep in a magnificent flutter of chewed paper bits. His greeting to her shone.

"Mum-mum-mum-my. Mummum."

She went to him and untangled his legs. Warm arms opened and closed.

"My sweet punkins." One ear invited nibbling. "You had to wait so long. Mommies going to feed her baby right away."

"Nun-nuh." The pink sills of his lips formed words with great effort. "Mauny feeded me. I fru."

Mya swung sharp on her resentment, body tightened.

"Maun! I didn't tell you to feed him. *I wanted* to do it. I even thought about . . ." She waited, remembering, as the silver beauty bowed.

"I obeyed your command, Oh, Earth One.

They regarded one another across a dark silence. Then Mya's body slackened. "Thank you," she said as she went into her sleeping chamber.

And she sat for a long time staring into her empty hands.

Andro showed no concern.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I can't understand your attitude, Mya."

He had eaten his dinner quietly, staring down into the foams of the cooking pit, sitting brittle and stiff, as befitted a man of importance, a man of prestige and position. And Mya had waited for the moment when his hand would move toward her body.

"Answer me."

"I don't know what it is, Andro. It's just a feeling I have about her."

"Please explain yourself."

"I don't want her here. I was happier before she came."

He withdrew his hand. "Oh, happy, happy. . .who can say what makes happiness and what doesn't? Most women would be delighted that their husbands had been so honored, but you—?"

"I *am* delighted," she insisted. "Please understand."

"What is there to understand?"

"That I'm also afraid."

"Of Maun?" He was surprised.

"Of Maun. . .or myself. . .or my thoughts. . . It's all the same thing."

"What nonsense is this, now?"

She peered through labyrinths of words for just the right ones. "I'm human, Andro. I can't control all my thoughts. My actions, yes. But thoughts come even when I don't call them. They can't be wrapped in tissue paper and tucked into a drawer."

"Oh?"

"Don't you see? Ask any psychiatrist. There is a stimulus, a reaction, an emotion, a thought. I can't do a thing about it."

"I fail to see what bearing this has."

"It has a lot. Things happen." She looked at the distant bubble-dwellings. In them were the silver eyed families.

"What sort of things?"

"Well, just a while back, when the Superior was here. . . ." After the words were there, out in the open, for him to stiffen against, she realized her error.

"The Superior was here?" He was immediately alerted. "When? You didn't mention it."

"Three sleep periods ago."

"And?" Eyeslits watched her carefully.

She opened her hands toward him. "I was hot and tired, and I happened to think I would like it if he left."

"And Maun forced him. . . .?"

She nodded.

His face collapsed and reassembled into something blackened and hard.

"Please don't get angry, Andro. Please don't!"

"How can you expect otherwise?" he shouted. "Stupid, silly woman that you are! You dare to jeopardize my position with your petty whims of who-stays-and-for-how-long!"

HIS fury c l o u d e d the room. "Only you could do it! Only Mya, wife of Andro!"

"But I've got to have some rest," she pleaded. "I've got to be able to think freely once in a while."

"Think freely, she says!" He stopped before her and fairly screamed into her face. "Doesn't Maun draw her energy from the sun? Doesn't she fall into a comatose sleep as soon as we go nightside? Isn't she almost dead just before daybreak? Can't you save your sniveling, puny pranks until then?"

"Please, Andro, please! You don't know what that means!"

"You'll tell me!" His face could not help itself.

"To think, to feel only in the night! Must I save everything—my loves, my fears, my angers—until just before daybreak?"

"Stop it!" he shrieked.

"Don't take my whole life and push it together and squeeze it into just the little time before the sun rises! Don't shove me into the dark like a sightless mole!"

Seizing her by the wrists, he drew her to her feet. With her arms bound, white and aching, to his chest, he spoke into her face. Slowly. Softly. To a not-quite-bright child.

"This ends here, Mya. I am the repre-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sentative of the Third Planet. The people of Venus have seen fit to single me out and make a present to my wife. My wife will not affront them! She will not discredit me by returning this gift. She will, instead, adapt herself. It is a simple thing." The house waited.

"Do you understand?"

They stared bitterly at one another.

"Do you understand?"

"I understand." Her voice was hollow.

He released her, and she sank back, her head bent over the numbed husks of her fingers. Andro stood watching the nape of her neck. He reached down abruptly and stroked a twist of hair.

"Mya," he said softly, caressing her, "you will do as a ask."

"I will do as you ask."

The Great Liaison Officer breathed deeply. "Well now—that's better." His fingers probed the hollows of her throat.

"Andro?" She slowed him.

"Yes?"

"Do you imagine they know us this well?"

"Who?"

The Elders. Do you imagine they knew we can hurt ourselves, maybe destroy ourselves, through a—a creature like her?"

He turned, his mind on other things, and undid his tunic.

"Mya, I am going to bed. You will follow."

"Right away." She crossed the room and picked up a globe from his work table, the miniature of a blue-green planet with wide seas and open plains. She held the full, wet summers, the clean, needle cities carefully in her hands.

As he reached the portal, Andro paused before its flow and surge.

"Oh, by the way, there is a dead bird on the wharf. I wish you'd have Maun bury it."

The globe dropped in glistening fragments at her feet. She was seeing a bird. A little, singing, gold-plated bird, whose shrill happiness had magnified the depths of her despair. And hating its happiness, she had thought she could kill it.

Mya knew the color of the bird that Maun would bury in the morning.

THEY sat, the three of them, saying no word, giving no sign. Like actors, Mya thought. Like actors, not acting. Just stopped—waiting on a dead stage for their cues. And when the line was said, when the words she was waiting for had been uttered, would she know what to do?

She was uneasy. Maun tended the water bushes, sharp against the sullen threat of clouds.

Dikki, boy botanist, balanced himself on his round bottom, and explored the wonders of a light-flower. One finger probed into its blue-grey flesh. The flower released a stream of scent.

"Nuh!" he said, and backed up precipitously. It had spit. Right at him. He teetered to his feet and retreated, riding his fat legs with confidence. They propelled him unsteadily, like reluctant pistons, toward the wharf.

Mya watched his progress with a tired half smile.

Then it wasn't even a half smile.

"Dikki!" she cried, "come back." Her body tensed to watch his flight. *"Dikki!"* The gap between boy and ledge grew smaller and smaller.

Suddenly, she was on her feet and running hard. "Come back!" she called to him. "Watch out, Dikki, watch out!"

She grabbed him a whisper from the edge, and they slid, rolling on one another to the brink. She looked into the sweet-smelling death of the lagoon. Frightened eyes, flung hard on its waters, looked back.

"Oh, Dikki!" she moaned. *"Oh Dikki, oh, Dikki, oh Dikki!"*

He moved in to her, pinpointed between laughter and tears. When she squeezed him, it tickled, and his face went kinky with smiles.

"Why you little imp!" She pulled him to safer sands. "What is the matter with you, running like that?" Quick, slight slaps dusting his bunting. "You

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can hurt yourself that way. Don't ever *do* that again."

Head thrown back, he offered her his delight.

"You naughty boy! Don't you grin at me that way. I ought to shake you till your head wobbles."

He ran in puppy circles, dragging at her fingers, bubbling to himself.

And then, from nowhere, Maun appeared in a shower of sparks. She went directly to the boy and knelt before him. She laid gentle hold of his shoulders. The palms turned inward—gently, easily—seeking the line of his throat. Long fingers laced together to form a band.

And she shook him. Great jerks set his head wobbling. Jolts ripped against the position of his body. He contorted into jagged spasms of limb and sound. An arm, a cry, his eyes... .Mya could no longer put him together.

She flung herself upon Maun with animal ferocity. Her fists struck out blindly from a time when love and violence had to be the same. She struck and struck again. She bit, but her teeth found no yielding in the flesh. She scratched, but her nails slid unnoticed from the metal. Her cries might have been the buzz of an insect.

The silver sheen became red—wet red. It came from Mya.

In final panic, she clutched her mangled hands together, half prayer, half weapon. As if she held a scythe, she cut back and forth across Maun's body, to and fro. Across the head and back . . . the face, and back. . .the shoulders, and back. . . . Furious, measured, desperate, useless, useless. . . .

And as to each thing there is a season, so Maun released the boy in her own time. She stood motionless. Down the measure of hated body, Mya wasted herself, till at last there was nothing left to do. But to sob and beat a little upon the earth.

The statue stood stolidly above her.

"I obeyed your command, Oh, Earth One," she said, while the summer noises sang.

PACING the late afternoon, Mya fled from fear. Thoughts touched her mind in spinning flight. Think, think, she told herself. She tried to reason, but the look of Dikki's face, the sound of his cry, hooded her effort. It would do no good. No good at all this way.

She ran to her dressing nook. Dikki slept soundly, safely, with his treasures stuffed under his stomach.

Something had to be done. But what, what, what? It was a wall. Andro would not be back—and even if he were. . . .? *No!* There was no one to turn to.

A face in the reflection bowl stopped her. "Look at me!" she thought. "I can't keep my mind together any longer." It was falling off bit by bit, and Maun was gathering all the pieces.

She bent to meet the reflection. Her eyes were large and hulled. "What must I do?" she asked the eyes.

The lips mimicked her own. The image seemed to silver. Another face, exactly like her own, looked back at her. She turned quickly, as if starting to run, but the room gave her no place to run to.

What if she should do it again? What if she should someday become angry enough to loose Maun, and—Her mind recoiled. It had to stop, end. She had to be rid of Maun somehow.

"I'll destroy her," she thought.

She had moved to Dikki's crib before the lightening speared out and held her. Her face blanched.

"I've done it! Dear God in Heaven! I've sent out a murder wave."

She groped her way to the bed and sank down, her head in her hands. Behind closed lids, she waited. Time waited with her. There was nothing more. Just emptiness and space.

Then the wind-clock stirred and exhaled. "It's almost night," she thought.

What did it matter? Day or night?

No, stop! She raised her head and looked at something far off. "Almost night!" she said aloud.

Thoughts began to arrange themselves in a pattern she could almost see.

Think. Try. Slowly now.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maun's energy was lessening already. As the sun went down, she would become weaker. Within one more rest period, she would be dormant. From then on, her sleep deepened with each passing hour. By daybreak she would be almost dead. It wasn't so hard now. The pieces were fitting together.

If the command could be timed for next week, or next month, why not for just before daybreak? When Maun, in her stupor, would be completely unable to carry it out? And when Mya would be free to do what she had to do?

She almost cried out. That was it. That was it. So simple, and yet so perfect. She couldn't understand why she hadn't thought of it before.

Mya shut her eyes against the world, and made the thought loud and clear. She gave it to Maun along the pathways of their minds. "I shall destroy her just before the sun rises."

She pushed it, thrust it, drove it down dark corridors to the brain that waited to receive it. "I shall destroy her *just before the sun rises.*"

And turning on her face, she gave up to exhaustion.

SHE swam upward through a sea of sleep. Abruptly, thoughts split the surface of her mind, and she sat upright.

She looked around the room. Something was missing. Something had been forgotten, but there was no shape to the feeling of loss that plagued her.

The curtains danced in the breeze. The room breathed quietly. It looked secure and whole. She listened for the breathing of Dikki's slumber. Glancing toward the nook, she could see the line of his cheek. His sleep was flushed and happy.

But something was lost. Something was wrong. A check of the room revealed nothing. She moved about, touching small objects, feeling their safeness.

It was then she heard the footsteps, and she turned to meet them. The portal mists waxed silver as Maun stood before her. Mya looked from the other's face to the container of dissolving fluid that she held in her hand. "I shall obey your command, Oh, Earth One."

There was a moment of vertigo—the instant of sway just before a giant tree falls. During that instant, Mya thought a thousand thoughts, searched through a thousand cubbyholes toward uttered phrases.

Where was the mistake? Where?

This was impossible. Maun couldn't be doing this. The room was still light . . . .the sun hadn't set. . . .

"The sun!" she said, and the lost was found.

Maun had never seen the sun! No one on this planet had ever seen it. Maun didn't even know what it was!

Somewhere a sound started, low and bubbling. . . .

The only "sun" she knew was not the one that gave her her life. It was the boy asleep in the next room. Her own son, Mya's son! The sound grew big and round and fat. . . .

So change the words, and say the sentence, as Maun must say it, to see what it looked like now. "I shall destroy *her* just before the son rises. . . ."

And the sound stretched high, high, high, to the sky. . . .

Mya leaned in on it, and tasted it, and knew it to be her own laughter.

Pretty soon the laughter stopped.

But the curtains kept right on dancing. . . .

ANDRO, First Liaison Officer of the Third Planet, floated back to the city with his wife's "present" beside him. His boat, pulled by an underwater sunburst of luminous fish, befitted a man of importance, a man of prestige and position. He glided to the milk-glass city where the sleep cocoons filled and closed in on themselves, where the taper trees flared, where the old dreamed of being younger, and the young dreamed of being older. He drifted to a castle, on a ridge, on a hill, where he was met by the elders with their shuttered faces. And they looked at the "present," who swayed weakly behind him, and smiled.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The crowd had the Word and had become a beast

The peace delegation declared WAR— on one man's stomach!

The BELLY of Gor Jeetl

By Charles A. Stearns

THE hopeful spires of the Friendship Tower, you will recall, rose steadily, tier upon tier, throughout the year A.D. 4000 plus, despite the fact that it was beginning, more and more, to resemble a neoclassical stock exchange than it did a tower, and that the higher it climbed, the lower sank the estate of diplomatic relations among its backers, the nations of the Alliance of Inner Planets.

The Venusians wanted it on Venus because, as they shrewdly noted, Venus is wide open; the vacationer's planet. Low taxes. Moderate building costs, and a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

diverting variety of entertainment for the visiting delegates when they should meet. Why the *derva*-girls alone—

Mars wanted it on Mars, because, they said, the world is centrally located, easily accessible, and the dry climate was sure to preserve the masonry of the Friendship Tower forever, an immortal monument to man's amicability.

The Jovian colonials wanted it on Ganymedé, because that would be most convenient (for Jupiter), and the Ganymedians agreed, if Jupiter would meet their share of the cost.

The kindest thing that can be said of the Saturnians, is that they were exceedingly s a t u r n i n e. They hadn't a chance, and they knew it. Everyone expected trouble with Saturn.

Earth got it on Earth, with an overwhelming majority of one vote and eighty-three million dollars.

The Friendship Tower spitted the occasionally-blue sky over Capitol City in less than eleven months from the time its corner-stone was laid, and waited in awesome emptiness for the first friendly meeting of worlds within it.

IF THERE was anyone who was completely satisfied with the Tower, it must have been Christopher M. Berthold, who first sketched it with gilt pen on a drawing board, and later drew it in bold lines of steel and plastic on the green horizon of his mother Earth. But Chris Berthold was a dour young man who had never in his life admitted that anything satisfied him.

By no coincidence, the man who built the tower was one of the three most famous architects in the solar system, at the age of only thirty one, but he held the obsession, apparently, that this fame was fleeting, that his public was a fickle group and might abandon him at any moment, that he ought to keep his insurance up, and his unemployment benefits in good standing, just in case. In short, the hell with life, the gloomy old thing.

All this did not keep Camilla Reed from loving him. It merely kept her at her distance. As a reporter for the *Gazette*, she had known him publicly for five years. As the freckle-faced little girl next door (remember?), she had been acquainted with his virtues and his idiosyncrasies since childhood, and worshipped them.

The only thing was, Camilla was still freckle-faced, and she had not grown up into a ravishingly beautiful young woman, the way freckle-faced little girls do in stories. Chris Berthold did *not* grovel at her feet—in fact, he scarcely seemed to know that she was alive—and nobody, so far, was living happily ever after. It was most discouraging.

Girl reporters are supposed to be fascinatingly flippant. Camilla often stammered through interviews. They are supposed to be vivacious, with lovely red hair; she was quiet, diminutive, and her hair was an indeterminate shade of brown. Reporters are supposed to be ill-mannered, inconsiderate of the privacy of others, cocky, devilish. Camilla was none of these.

That was the reason she often got into places no other newsperson could, scooped ace reporters, and came away leaving a warm, co-operative glow in the hearts of important people. And she didn't even suspect it.

She was on hand, along with five hundred and seventeen other reporters the day they opened the Friendship Building to the first Congress of the Alliance. The other five hundred and sixteen reporters were collaring the delegates as they arrived, pumping them dry of words, and setting them free. Camilla was only looking for Chris Berthold.

She discovered him, at last, in the visitor's gallery, where he hadn't any business to be. She sacrificed her seat in the reserved section, tramped on three sets of toes getting out, and made for him like a homing pigeon.

The mezzanine level was crowded. Fifteen acres of milling, pleasantly buzzing humanity—and some of them not so human. She pushed her way among

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them, wishing, for once, that she were six inches taller. She had marked her course by a pillar, but now all pillars were beginning to look alike. It was half an hour before she found him, leaning against the railing, staring not at the boiling sea of humanity below, but moodily at the domed roof.

"Hi!" she said.

He turned, recognized her with a faintly absent glare. "Hello, Cam. What're you doing here?"

She repressed a desire to run her fingers through his hair. Darkly exciting hair it was. "Covering," she said vaguely. "Imagine us running into each other here. Why, you ought to be down there with the Vips. The rest of them, I mean."

HE SNARLED. "There's too many on the proscenium now. The flooring will warp. I warned them about it." He grumbled at length about the stinginess of the Government, and the cupidity of certain fly-by-night contractors. It was a familiar tirade. She listened patiently until he was finished. It didn't matter to Camilla what he talked about it. She just loved to hear his voice.

"I think it's wonderful," she said. "I mean a place that will hold a hundred thousand people. It's a shame that you can stand right here among all these people, and nobody even recognizes you —the man who built it."

"I like it this way," he said. "Supposing it falls down tomorrow. Then where would I be?"

She started to laugh, and his look froze her. Camilla bit her lip. "I don't see you around much lately," she said, desperately changing the subject.

"I've been pretty busy."

"I know." A lag in the conversation. They watched the panorama below. Loudspeakers were blaring out the names of the delegates as they arrived.

The loudspeaker: "HIS EXCELLENCY, LORD CHANCELLOR OF MORDANA, THIRD DISTRICT, MARS."

A red beetle-being, scarcely four feet tall, followed by a retinue of twenty guards and assistants, scurried along the roped-off aisle to the central council table.

"THE HONORABLE YUN BROOL, REPRESENTATIVE, SECTOR 263, JUPITER."

A dark-suited group of humanoids, faintly alien in aspect, walking close together. They looked faintly disdainful of the proceedings. Which was Yun Brool? They were identically dressed.

"You can bet the one in the middle is Brool," Camilla said to Chris. "Jovians are always afraid of being assassinated."

"Umm," said Christopher Berthold, gazing suspiciously at a rubberneck a few yards away, who showed every evidence that he was about to scratch his initials in one of the pseudo-marble columns with his pen-knife.

"SEVERN ALON, TERRITORIAL CHIEFTAIN, IO."

"The Noble Experiment," Chris said, "Do they really think it will work?"

"What's that?" Camilla said. "Say, look! There's a funny one coming in now."

His answer was drowned. "DR. GOR JEETL, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OF FOREIGN RELATIONS, FIRST ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT, SATURN."

There was a lull of sound below, followed by a high-pitched song of excitement. It had been rumored that Saturn would send no representative to this meeting.

Dr. Gor Jeetl was alone, but it might have been remarked (as doubtless it was many times) that he was quite a congregation by himself. He appeared to be of Terran extraction, except that no Earthman of modern times was ever so huge. He must have weighed more than the entire Martian contingent.

Roughly eight feet in height, his girth was such that when he walked it was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like the progression of an out-sized balloon, all dressed in loose-fitting blue uniform.

"What a bel—" Camilla said. "I mean, look at the size of him."

"Disgusting," said Chris.

GOR JEETL, if he sensed the hostility in that gigantic meeting house, gave no sign of it. Propelling his paunch agilely before him, he beamed benignly upon them all as he made his way to the council table.

He took a seat—rather, *tried* to take a seat. It was impossible. A hurried conference. They brought another quickly, without confining arm-rests. He flowed onto it, gratefully.

The guards began to clear the main floor, boosting the crowd back upstairs. It was almost time for the assembly to come to order.

But there was something not right here. Camilla sensed it. An undercurrent of tenseness about the great table below. The look on Chris's face. A wolf-like watchfulness. Chris always expected the worst, she knew from hard experience, but this was something special.

"They're frightened," she said with sudden inspiration. "Why are they frightened?"

Chris gave her a look of sour disapproval. "You're a reporter," he said accusively. "If I tell you something, can you keep it under your hat until the thing's done with?"

"Sure I can."

He didn't look at her. "There's a rumor going around among the delegates," he said. "They say a bomb has been smuggled in. Nothing to it, of course, but—"

"The Saturnians?"

He shrugged savagely. "How would I know?"

"Something *is* going to happen," Camilla said. "I feel it."

"Nonsense. Anyway, I only care about the building. Diplomats are a dime a dozen."

This isn't like him, Camilla was thinking. *He's always predicting calamities, but now—*

"You could be killed here," he said, with no particular inflection. "But I don't suppose you could be talked into leaving if you knew the roof was coming down on your head?"

"What?" she laughed, "and have the city editor slit my throat?" But her heart leaped. It had sounded almost as though he were just a little concerned for her safety.

"I suppose you're right," he said after a moment. "Where were you intending to have lunch?"

"N-nowhere in particular," she said eagerly.

"Don't eat here," he advised her glumly. "The vendomats are sluggish. The heating coils are inadequate, and the selectors should have had cadmium breakers instead of the cheap stuff. I designed it that way, but you can't tell them anything. Well, I've got to be getting along. See you later."

TELUG THREE-SEVEN-GEE, lately of Venus, was not so frivolous as his brilliantly red comb made him appear. It arched his carapaced back and stood stiffly erect upon his bald pate, like the plumed helmet of ancient Greek warriors, quivering slightly as he endeavored to hear and annotate everything that was said. He was Amanuensis Extraordinary to his party, and his keen ears were highly trained.

He was the first to hear the ticking sound. It was not like the tick of a watch. Subtly different. It was, however, rather like something else he had heard once. But that could not be.

Could it?

Furtively he glanced around him. Over there sat the Martian delegation, brilliant, cynical little creatures. Near them were the Earth men. And on the other side, the black tunicked Jovians.

To his right was his own party. Nothing among them would make such a sound, he was certain.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On Telug's other side sat the Saturnian representative, Dr. Gor Jeetl. Dr. Jeetl sat tranquilly listening to the discourse of a hundred diplomats with a fixed smile on his circular face. His abdomen rested comfortably upon his knees, making a kind of dais upon which to place his folded arms.

The ticking was coming from Gor Jeetle. It was extremely faint. No one but Telug could have heard it.

Efficient secretary that he was, he immediately penned a note, folded it twice, and passed it down to the leader of his party, Madong Five-seven-ex. It might have noted that Telug's topknot had turned quite pale.

Madong, resplendent in his custard-yellow suit, read the note. He leaned over so that he could catch Telug's eye, past the three Vensusians that sat between them. Telug nodded gravely.

Madong pressed the red button in front of him, requesting audience. He was recognized by the chairman.

Madong stood. His heavy lips felt dry. He licked them with bulbous, blue tongue. "Mr. Chairman," he said, "the Venusian delegation respectfully requests permission to withdraw from the assembly of Friendship until further notice."

Mr. Chairman eyed him keenly. He was a shrewd Ganymedian. "May we ask the reason for this request?"

"The Venusian delegation would rather not say."

An ominous ripple progressed around the table, affecting every person except, perhaps, one Gor Jeetl. He was gravely contemplating his silver belt buckle.

"Obviously," the Ganymedian chairman said, "we cannot permit the gentlemen from Venus to leave unless they consent to explain their action."

Madong, emissary of Venus, sprang up with apparent agitation. He started around the table, heels clicking loudly on the floor. It seemed that it required fifteen minutes for him to circumnavigate that huge circle, but it could not have been half so long.

He whispered in the chairman's ear.

"Are you sure?" the chairman said, louder than he had intended. Everyone jumped. Almost everyone.

Madong nodded in a positive fashion.

The chairman rapped with his gavel. "We will take a recess," he said. "Fifteen minutes." He turned and whispered to two khaki-clad Terran guards.

The delegates sprang up willingly, milled about, chattering among themselves as they left the conference area.

ARISING was quite a problem for Dr. Gor Jeetl. He had no arm rests on his chair, you will recall, on which to brace his hands. Nevertheless, he was sure that he could make it. He turned sidewise on his inadequate seat, placed one hand on the back of his chair and made a heroic effort. Nothing happened. A heavy weight on each shoulder was holding him down.

Two white-gloved clad hands. He looked up with some surprise into the faces of the two guards.

There was not the slightest trace of compassion there. Two gendarmes *sans merci*.

The Captain of the Friendship Tower Guards was a fearless, red-faced man. Captains of the Guard are always red-faced and fearless. He spitted the Assistant Commissioner of Foreign Relations of Saturn with his gimlet eye, an impressive man who knew the overwhelming weight of his own personality.

The gallery was silent. The people knew that something extraordinary was going on, so they quelled the normal impulse to discuss it in order to satisfy that strongest of human yearnings. If they were quiet there was a bare possibility that they might *hear* something. The Word was not yet in the air. When it came they would change from rational beings into a huge, slavering beast—a mob. But the time was not yet; the beast lay hidden.

Gor Jeetl appeared mildly curious as

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the reason for this sudden surplus of attention with which he was being deluged.

"Why am I held, Captain?" he asked. "It seems most inhospitable, to say the least. Think what this may do to the relations between our worlds, yours and my native Saturn."

"We have already thought of that," the Captain said.

"You have?" said Dr. Jeetl, surprised.

"Come, come," the Captain said. "The game's up. We know all about you, Fatty. One of the Venusian party heard the ticking."

Gor Jeetl turned crimson throughout the vast expanse of his sagging jowls and three chins. "So you know!" he breathed. "I shall report your rudeness, nonetheless."

"Sure. Do that. Meanwhile, just where *is* it? You were scanned when you came in, along with everyone else."

"Here, of course," said Gor Jeetl, placing a hand upon his stomach with dignity. "Clever of them, and most convenient, I will admit, though I have loathed the knowledge. If only—"

The Captain laid his ear to the vast expanse of stomach. His eyes widened. "Incredible," he said. "When is the —the machine set for?"

"I see no harm in divulging that now," Dr. Jeetl said. "It is timed for Earth noon."

"You see no harm—you see no—!" The Captain tried to laugh, and strangled on it. He looked like a man reprieved from the grave. "There's time, you imbecile! Supposing we spirited you out of here—dropped you in the ocean?"

"Please!" Dr. Gor Jeetl smiled wanly. "The mechanism is extremely delicate. You are likely to upset it talking of such unpleasant things."

The Captain of the Guards blanched. "You are saying that we dare not move you?"

"It would be hazardous."

The Captain took out a tiny instrument and waved it like a wand over Gor Jeetle's middle. The pinpoint light on the gadget blinked rapidly.

"Radiation," he said. "It's worse than we thought."

"Such a thing—*inside him?*" an assistant asked incredulously.

"Of course. Don't you see the diabolical cleverness of the Saturnian's choice. Inside him, there'd be room for a whole armoury."

"It was the only practical thing," said Gor Jeetle, with quiet bitterness.

"There is only one thing to do," the Captain of the Guard said, "and that is to clear the area at once. Rogers, you will inform the Superintendent, and also the platoon leader on the gallery floor. I'll take care of things here."

But his last words were lost in a savage roar that grew into a tornadic fury of sound, filling the hall, battering at their ears, threatening sanity.

For someone had been indiscreet. The crowd had the Word, and had become the beast.

Bomb!

IT WAS exactly 11:18 when they broke. In the history of that decade there had been no comparable disaster. Nine died. Thousands were injured. They poured down the spiral causeways like the flood of spring rains over a dam, and it was said later that only the superb designing job of the architect, Christopher Berthold, prevented casualties from being much higher.

It required twenty minutes to clear the building. It would have taken six, if it could have been done in orderly fashion.

The police were to clear the sector of the city for three miles in each direction. There was no need. No citizen stopped running half so near as that. Of course, later on, when the panic had subsided, the streets had to be roped off and guarded to prevent them from trooping back, for fear they might miss something. That was human nature, and to be expected.

The diplomats were herded, with di-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plomacy, into the Grand Solar Hotel in another part of the city, and closely guarded. The Friendship Tower, looming whitely against the skyline, was suddenly vacant.

Well, almost vacant. In the great meeting hall, at the table which dwarfed even his respectable figure, sat the delegate from Saturn, Dr. Gor Jeetl, obediently following the orders of Terran authorities. He was the merest speck in the vasty place, and if there had been any there to see, they would have noted a stolid determination in the set of his mouth—the look of a dedicated man.

For, after all, it had been Saturn's plan, people said, merely to destroy the building; the destruction of ten thousand beings had been, in itself, incidental, if it had occurred. The fission bomb planted in Gor Jeetle's belly through some incredible operation would accomplish its purpose, and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

The City Fathers had gathered on a rooftop, five miles away, to watch the destruction. Some of the most important men on Earth were there. Observation wings cautiously shied around the area, taking last pictures, waiting for the grandest shot of all.

Some felt sorry for Chris Berthold, the man who had spent five years designing the Friendship Tower. But Berthold was not there. He had other things on his mind.

He had been a third of the way around the blockaded area when he discovered his first clue. He tried to run the barricade. The guard had his job to do. He saw only a hatless, wild-eyed young man with a sandy crew-cut, trying to commit suicide.

"Halt," he said.

"Have you seen a girl come out of here?" Chris said. "Golden-brown hair. Blue eyes. Blue suit. Black shoulder bag. Think!"

The guard shook his head. "Comin' out—no. Not more'n five hundred that meet that description, I'd say. Are you crazy or something? Say—there was one tried to get through here a minute ago that fits that description to a "T." I wouldn't let her in. The whole place is due to blow any minute, or didn't you know?"

"Trying to get in? But that wouldn't have been Camilla. Even a newspaperwoman would have better sense."

"She was nuts," the guard said. "She was crying and saying something about they couldn't blow up the Friendship Tower after this guy had worked so hard on it, and she was going to stop it."

"She got out and went back!" Chris said. "Good God! And it's only fifteen minutes to twelve. She must've gotten through somewhere."

"Somewhere, hell!" the guard said. "She got through here. She—"

"But I thought you said you wouldn't let her in?"

"She got past me. What you want me to do, shoot her in the back? You think I was going to run in there after her? You think—"

Christopher Berthold, who had never so much as shoved a fellow human being in his life, struck the guard with a large, enthusiastic fist, just over the left eye. The guard, unprepared, went down and stayed down. Chris took the squad car, parked at the curb, and roared off in the direction of the Tower. The guard said later that there had been a maniacal glint in his eye.

SHE had gotten through, all right. He saw her legs twinkling up those eighteen broad steps—one for every member planet and satellite nation of the Friendship Alliance. She was running.

It was exactly four minutes until twelve by his watch. He ran after her, sick with the knowledge that he must be too late.

There in the portal he caught her arm. Her cheeks were tear and grime-streaked as she turned, startled, to face him. Her hair was in disarray. But

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she was beautiful, and she had never been beautiful before.

"This is a fine fix you've got us in," he said.

"I couldn't bear to see it go. The only thing you ever l-loved. Your life work. Oh, I knew how you felt, despite the fact that you always grumble so."

"You're crazy," he said dully. "Completely crazy. Do you think I'd trade your life for a building? Stop crying and come on; it's too late to turn back now. We've got to stop the madman if we can."

They hurried, and the empty Tower, silent as a cathedral, mocked them with the echoes of their pounding feet.

In the center of the rotunda, the big table, where men were to have met as good neighbors, glistened in the light from the transparent door, more than a quarter of a mile above.

Gor Jeetl, the Saturnian, was still sitting where the world had left him.

He greeted them with a grave nod. "Why have you come back?" he said. "Never mind answering. The world is full of madness today."

"Listen," Chris said, "the contrivance is supposed to go off in three minutes. Isn't there any way you can delay it until this girl is in the clear. Surely you have nothing against her."

Gor Jeetl turned disillusioned eyes upon Camilla. "She is a lovely, innocent girl," he said. "Almost a child, I can see that. I am sorry—truly sorry that she must be here to witness my degradation. But there is nothing I can do." There was a tear in his eye. "It will go off at precisely twelve o'clock. I regret to say that the scientists of Saturn build well."

"Then there's nothing more to do except wait," Chris said. He put his arms about Camilla. It was never too late for some things. "Listen," he said, "I want to tell you something."

"One minute and a half . . ." Camilla said. And she was strangely happy, because she had thought that Christopher's arm would never be around her, even in death. "What is it?"

"I love you," he said. "Oh, I know I'm a heel, but I've got to say it. So there. If only his damned ship had been blasted out of the air before it got to Earth, things would have been different!"

Dr. Gor Jeetl looked shocked at the thought of inserting such a violent emotion in this tender moment, for he was a romanticist, at heart.

""Half a minute," said Camilla softly, "Twen—"

THERE was a soft, but clearly audible sound emerging suddenly from somewhere within the cavernous depths of Gor Jeetl. A pleasant, bell-like tone, like a sweet-voiced alarm clock. The Saturnian turned his face away, and it was contorted with emotion.

"The warning signal," Chris said. "Goodby, darling." He kissed her. It was quite an expert kiss for a young man more experienced in reading decitrig slide rules. He intended that it should last until the end. But he ran out of breath. It seemed quite a long time, and still nothing had happened.

Nothing.

"Something is wrong," Camilla said.

But the curious expression was still on Gor Jeetl's face. Not fear; not the anticipation of the end. Something almost like repugnance.

"You did not laugh," Gor Jeetl said. "For that I thank you." He waited, while they stared in horrified expectation. "Oh, you need not stay any longer," he said. "It is all over. My ignominy is complete now, is it not? I am ready to go home."

Still no answer. "Wait a minute," said Chris after a moment, "just what *is* it that's inside you? A belated light was dawning.

"Why you must know, of course. It is an artificial stomach. Many years ago I had an ulcer. They removed my digestive system and installed a mechanical thing in its place. There was no longer any hunger pangs to warn me

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that I need nourishment, therefore the bell within me. I shall never forgive them for that. I did not ask for it. I, Gor Jeetl, to be embarrassed three times daily!" The Saturnian was frankly crying now. He propped his chins on his belly and wiped his nose with his shirt collar. "The ticking?" said Chris in an odd voice.

"Oh, it ticks a little now and then. It needs overhauling. If it hadn't been for that accursed, long-eared Venusian! They jumped at the chance, of course, to humiliate me! No one would have known, otherwise." He slumped on the table, wracked with sobs. "That man's stomach should bring shame upon his entire nation!" he blubbered.

"Don't you understand," Chris shouted in his ear, "We thought it was a bomb. Everybody thought it was a bomb; that Saturn had determined to blow up Friendship Tower just to spite Earth!"

Gor Jeetl looked up at him through small, bleary eyes. Uncomprehending eyes. "Oh, my dear young man!" he said.

Chris turned away with Camilla. He could no longer trust himself to speak.

"Poor fat man," said Camilla softly, and she could not suppress a giggle.

"It's lunch time," said Chris. "The vendomat will be empty. Before we go back to tell the others, we could get a bite to eat there . . . together."

ARE YOU HEAVEN WISE?

LISTED below, in jumbled fashion are 10 names pertaining to heavenly bodies, types of phenomena, etc., together with a brief description and/or explanation of each. See if you can match up at least 7 of them correctly for a passing score; 8-9 is good; 10 excellent.

1. COMET	(a) aurora, rainbow, etc.
2. AERIAL METEORS	(b) any luminous cloud-like object in the sky, as a distant star-cluster.
3. AQUEOUS METEORS	(c) one of a group of smaller planets or planetoids, between Mars and Jupiter.
4. IGNEOUS METEORS	(d) a heavenly body, consisting of a coma surrounding a star-like nucleus with a nebulous tail.
5. LUMINOUS METEORS	(e) a secondary planet revolving round a primary one.
6. METEOROID	(f) rain, snow, etc.
7. SATELLITE	(g) a luminous band encircling the heavens, composed of distant stars and nebulae invisible separately to the naked eye.
8. ASTEROID	(h) lightning, shooting stars, etc.
9. MILKY WAY	(i) one of innumerable small particles of matter moving through the celestial spaces, which, when they encounter the atmosphere, form meteors or shooting stars.
10. NEBULA	(j) the winds.

(Answers on page 144)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Top of the World

by I. G. Edmonds

THERE is a strange land where the sky sometimes has multiple suns glowing redly over its crystal horizon. At other times the odd sky turns into a brilliant mirror to reflect the surface so clearly that lost wanderers have used it to find their way. Small animals take on colossal proportions and bears have been mistaken for mice. Visitors there have eaten the flesh of animals extinct on earth for more than 30,000 years. The natives themselves are creatures from the distant past and *invisible* monsters stalk the harsh wastelands.

Incredible, but true! The only fakery in this fantastic land is the charlatanism of nature herself. You may go there and personally cheek its wonders. It requires neither spaceship, time machine or even a passport for much of this strange land is American territory.

This country that duplicates many of the wonders science fictionists attribute to exotic planets in deep intersteller space is our own Arctic, as amazing a world as any imagined in fiction.

One of the most startling sights to the newcomer in the Far North is the fairly common occurrence in which the sun becomes twins and triplets. The

The Land Where Science Fiction Comes True!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sight of three suns glowing redly above the ice-coated trees gives the awesome illusion of some crystal world revolving around a trinary sun in a far galaxy. This science-fictionish sight is known in the arctic as a "sundog". The mock suns are due to ice crystals in the air which act as lenses to cast the supplemental images. They are most often seen around camps and towns where the heat from fires causes the formation of extensive ice fog. The low arctic sun shining thru these suspended banks of ice crystals frequently form the sundogs.

Next to the fantastic appearing sundog, the most unusual trick of the polar sky is the famed "skymap." Here the smooth overcast of clouds reflect the image of the terrain below. Details are somewhat indistinct, but the experienced wanderer quickly learns to read its varying tones of light and shade with remarkable accuracy. From it he can detect leads—open water breaks in the ice pack. He can tell the kind of ice and terrain ahead of him. He can spot camps and hunting parties miles ahead by the reflected images mirrored on the clouds. One Alaskan sourdough, driving a mail loaded dogsled along a narrow mountain trail, claimed to have detected a bushwhacker waiting to waylay him on the other side of the hill's crest by the reflection of his dark clothing on the low clouds above him.

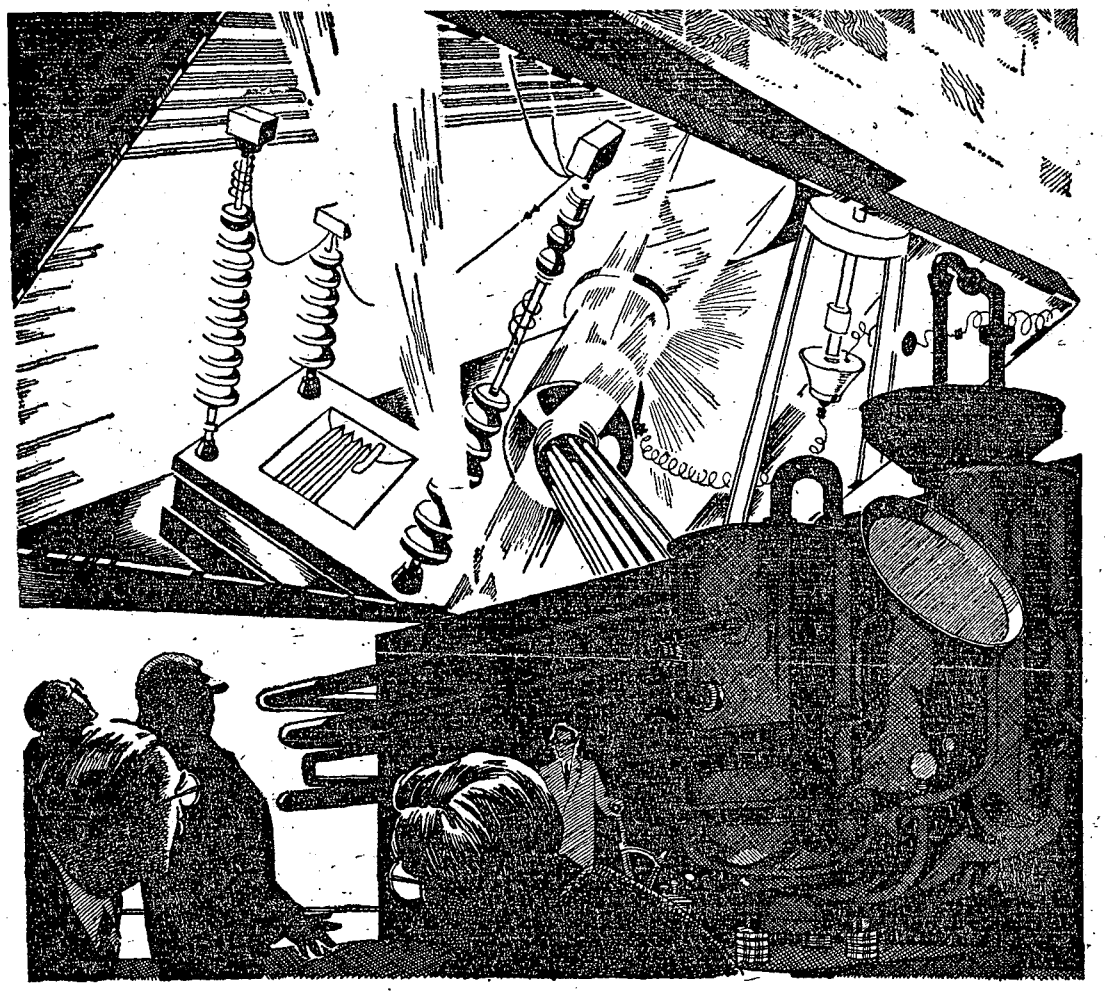
Science fiction writers like to speculate on the annihilation of time and space. In the arctic time slows down in the long nights and days, but it is still there. Space on the other hand becomes the joke of playful nature. Under an overcast sky the ice world takes on a smooth grayness that completely eliminates the illusion of perspective. The yellowish white polar bear blends so perfectly with his gray surroundings that he becomes invisible. There are numerous recorded cases of these monsters approaching very close to exploring parties before they were detected by their black noses. On the other hand, a black object will be visible for an incredible distance. In the even grayness when there is nothing for comparison, very tiny objects lose their size and trick the brain into wild guesses. One explorer told of sighting a mountain with two great glaciers running down its slopes. Then, as he approached closer, he found it was a walrus. What he had thought glaciers were the creature's tusks. Entire mountain ranges have been added to maps by explorers tricked in this manner.

In the extreme cold of the polar regions the struggle for existence is so bitter that the progress of civilization is stalled before the basic problem of just keeping alive. In the back country the Eskimo is still a stone age people. The natural icebox in which they live has preserved intact many relics of the stone age. Occasionally the frozen bodies of prehistoric mammoth have been discovered perfectly preserved in the ice. As to the edibility of the meat preserved in these natural deepfreezes, opinions differ. Several parties have reported feeding the 30,000 to 50,000 year old meat to their sledge dogs without ill effect. One writer claimed to have dined on the flesh of mammoth and enjoyed it highly, while another reported he tried it and became sick. But he admitted that his illness could have been caused by his imagination.

Strangely enough, there may be a connection between this land locked in ice and one of the most famous scientific mysteries—the great stone faces of Easter Island. Among the many types of totem poles carved by the Indians of southern Alaska is the floating totem.

According to legend, the idea of these floating totems came to the people from a carved wooden pole that the Pacific Ocean currents washed up on their shores. Some of the floating totems made by the Indians bear figures which show a startling resemblence to the faces of the Easter Island statues. A coincidence or did the Alaskan totem have its origin in the mysterious stone figures on the far away island? Just another of the mysteries frozen in the arctic! ● ● ●

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Peter fiddled with switches and dials . . .

He knew he wouldn't have much to offer Norma unless his matter transmitter transmitted matter, but the only matter she really cared about was — matrimony!

BOOBY PRIZE

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I

PETER MANSFIELD waved a hand in a gesture that included the laboratory inclusively and said, "I can't wait to turn it on."

Norma Higgins smiled up at him and said, "Peter, you're still a bit of a breathless kid at heart, aren't you?"

Peter nodded boyishly. "Maybe I am," he admitted with a grin. "But after a guy has worked and slaved for about five years, and then he finally gets his job finished, it's tough to wait before he can try it out."

"Just 'till tomorrow," said Norma softly. "It isn't so awfully long. In the meantime, Peter, maybe we can think of the day after tomorrow and the day after that?"

Peter Mansfield forgot the two equipments that were the focal points of the laboratory and turned to the girl. Norma came into his arms with a great amount of quiet enthusiasm. Her lithe young body pressed against him, tempting him. Her lips were warm and eager. Then before he was ready to let her go, Norma leaned back in his arms and asked softly, "Why must we wait, Peter? Why not tonight? Right now?"

He shook his head unhappily. "No," he said stubbornly, "not until I can look you in the eye."

Norma shrugged herself out of his arms—not angrily, but

a novelet by GEORGE O. SMITH

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with enough display of annoyance to let him understand that she thought his remark entirely uncalled for. "You're a bit of a booby, Peter," she told him. "We've been putting this off for four or five years just because you are afraid of my bank book. You've been struggling like an overloaded draft animal on an uphill drag just so you can prove to me that you've got what it takes to support me. Darn it, Peter, I don't need to be supported. And I could have helped you, you know, if you'd been less stubborn. You could have hired help, you could have bought equipment, you might have been finished sooner. But no. Is that—"

Peter Mansfield looked down at the floor. "Norma," he said plaintively, "I couldn't let my wife support me. It isn't the way I was brought up."

NORMA moved into his arms again to show him that she was irritated but not angry. "You're a sweet fool, Peter. But sometimes too much of a fool and not as sweet as you might be." She kissed him quickly. "Let's not beat the past to death. It's past. Let's hope for tomorrow. And why not tonight? You're on the brink of success. Let's make it complete."

"I'd like to. But there's only one catch."

"A catch?"

Peter Mansfield nodded unhappily. "Don't you think for one moment that I don't know your father's feelings. He poured money into this project because you urged him to, not because he felt that I was a howling success."

Norma laughed gently. "Peter, you'd take his money, so why not take mine?"

Peter smiled grimly. "Because it is your father that I've got to face, even more than you. Sure," he said with a bitter smile, "I could have poured a million of your dollars down the drain and if I'd failed, you'd have forgotten it. But I'd know that and maybe I'd have worked less hard—"

"You? Nonsense."

"—but when it is a strictly business proposition, and I make a success and hand your father the details of a paying proposition, then both he—and me—and the rest of the world will know that I've got what it takes, instead of having to lean financially on a wealthy wife."

"You'd think I was buying you like a puppy."

"I wonder if you might not have been trying to," he grunted.

"I won't even answer that," said Norma with a slight flare of anger. "So suppose you show me what it has taken you five years to build."

Peter looked down at her and took a deep breath. He felt relieved. He would prefer to spend the next twenty-four hours explaining his project to someone who knew it rather well than to spend the next couple of hours in the same futile argument they'd been engaged in for some time.

She smiled up at him. "Tell me more about your matter transmitter and what your big problem was."

"Shucks," he grinned, "you know as much about it as I do."

"Not really. Oh, I've heard you expound for years but it still goes over my head."

"You've studied about pair production, of course."

"I flunked. Even with your help I flunked."

He smiled slightly. "Pair production takes place when a gamma radiation of the right energy passes close to a nucleus. The gamma radiation then changes into an electron and a positron. Conversely, when an electron and a positron collide, they produce a quantum of gamma radiation."

"This I know, but how and why?"

"How deep do you want to go into nuclear physics?"

"Not very. Just explain once more how pair production makes a matter transmitter possible."

Peter said, "Not very long after pair production was found to be a fact in cloud chamber photographs, the nuclear

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

physicists began to compute the energies that might be needed for pair production of nuclear particles. If pair production took place between the lighter particles, it should take place among the heavier particles providing the gamma radiation was energetic enough. Sure enough, when they built the super-accelerators, they found that they could produce proton pairs and neutron pairs. Then someone caught sight of an alpha pair being produced and that started the construction of the super-super colossal accelerator, in which they caught the pair production of lithium nuclei, and

means of a parabolic reflector, coated with one of the semi-conducting elements, through which a rather high current is being passed. Otherwise the radiation is so hard that it just goes through anything. When the tight beam hits a second parabolic reflector of similar construction, the hard gamma is focussed to an atomic point and the nucleus re-forms. In other words, if I break up a nucleus of iron, for instance, into its half-pair equivalent of hard gamma, when the radiation is focussed once more, the radiation produces an iron nucleus."

Basic Tenet

PROVING there is nothing new under the sun, George O. Smith here presents a man of the future who has the very old-fashioned notion that he mustn't take money from a girl. Even if he intends to marry said girl, when theoretically everything his becomes hers anyway. Autre temps, autre mores, which is a good slogan for a science fiction magazine, leaves us this loophole at least, that some of the basic tenets of human nature are apt to survive.

The desire of the male to impress his lady love—by his muscles, brilliance, wit or money—is going to be hard to erase. Fact, we wonder if it *should* be erased. It's been responsible for a lot of poetry written and bridges built.

—The Editor

then beryllium, and then came a sprinkling of the next few higher nuclear weights. They even got a couple of sodium nuclei from the first attempts.

"Somewhere in here they discovered that each atom had its own resonant frequency, and that if you bombarded the nucleus with that resonant frequency the result would be half a pair's worth of resulting gamma."

"That's where I always get lost. First you bombard your junk with gamma, and cause it to break up into more gamma, which doesn't seem quite right."

PETER laughed. "This is the easy part," he assured her. "The gamma from my bombarder is absorbed in the production of the half-pair; the resulting radiation can be sent in a tight beam by

"I'm still behind, but I probably never will catch up."

"Oh, there's a lot more to it than that," smiled Peter. "Mine is about as simple and incomplete an explanation as you'll ever hear about anything. Most of it is oversimplified to the point of being almost incorrect, but to really explain takes knowledge of matrix mathematics and the theory of nuclear determinants."

"Don't bother. Just go on."

Peter nodded. "The big problem," he said slowly, "was the development of a scanning device. In order to reconstruct any object faithfully, the reformed atom must reassemble in exactly the same relative position. No one could ever do it mechanically. But a magnetic field can bend the radiation if the field is

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strong and localized. The trouble was in control. The atomic proportions are so minute that the matter of a few micro-micro-amperes will cause success or failure. Considering that the electro-magnets carry several hundred amperes, the variation of ten to the minus twelfth amperes is well-nigh impossible to control. It took me five years, but now I've done it."

"And tomorrow?" asked Norma. "Tomorrow you are going to demonstrate this to father."

"Uh-huh."

"And then the next day—?"

Peter Mansfield turned back to the girl with a strained smile. He reached for her and she came into his arms with a smile that matched his. "I'll bet you haven't heard a word I said."

"Yes I did. Most of it went over my head, but at least you've gotten it out of your system. Now, Peter, take me dancing."

"I can't afford to."

"I can. And I'll pout and be disagreeable if you don't let me."

"Damn all headstrong women," grunted Peter. But he went, and after an hour or so he relaxed.

II

THEY came in a body at nine thirty the next morning. Peter showed them to chairs in the laboratory, but Walter Higgins remained standing. "These are some of my Board of Directors," he said to Peter. "Meet Mr. Harrison, Vice-President in charge of Engineering and Research of Higgins Development Company. And this is Mr. Forsyth, Executive Vice-President of Higgins Enterprises, Incorporated. Mr. Lewis, Vice-President of the Higgins Industrial Trust. Mr. Thomason, of Higgins and Thomason Investment Company. Gentlemen, this is the young man of whom I spoke. I would have had you here before this, but there was nothing much to see. And young Mr. Mansfield had nothing to say but a lot of high-sounding explanation that none of us could understand. However, he assures me that he is ready to demonstrate. This is true?"

Peter nodded. The collection of vice-presidents made him nervous. He would have preferred that the first demonstration took place before this rather public announcement. But he had been told rather firmly by Walter Higgins that these were the men who were helping him pour money into the matter transmitter, and so they had every right to see the first demonstration.

"I'll explain how this works," he said, hoping that his voice would gain strength as he went along. "In—"

"Don't bother," said Walter Higgins, waving the explanation aside with a gesture of his cigar. The long ash held firm during the airy wave. "None of us could follow it. Just show us how it works and maybe we can grasp the explanation later, if we care to study that sort of thing. I—"

He was interrupted by another arrival. Norma came in breathlessly and asked, "Am I late?"

"Late!" stormed Walter Higgins. "You weren't invited."

"I invited myself."

"You were told not to come."

Father and daughter eyed one another like a pair of gladiators about to gladiate. "I know," she said in a cheerful voice. "And it wouldn't be the first time I did something I was told not to do, either."

"Your mother—"

"Mother wouldn't paddle my bottom either," she said. "In fact, mother agreed with me that there was no reason why I shouldn't watch this demonstration."

Walter Higgins sat down glowering. He shoved the long cigar in his mouth and clamped down on it. He puffed vigorously and exhaled a cloud of smoke. Whatever anger he felt was being taken out on the cigar.

"Am I late?" asked Norma.

"No," said Peter in an unhappy voice.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was upset. Walter Higgins had backed this project grudgingly. He disliked the evidence of emotional entanglement between his daughter and Peter Mansfield. And instead of Norma Higgins playing it quiet and glossing over the old man's angry attitude, Norma was practically shoving her interest in Mansfield into her father's disapproving face.

"Get going," snapped Higgins from around his cigar.

PETER swallowed a large lump. From the desk he picked up a cube of metal. "This is a two inch cube of iron," he said shakily. "For the first demonstration, I will convert the cube into its radiation equivalent, send the radiation down the length of the laboratory, and reassemble it at the receiving equipment down there. Once this has been done, I have a number of other objects to transmit, in increasing complexity. For instance, there is a pair of pliers to show that alloy steels can be faithfully reproduced, and also that a moving joint can be maintained. We have a cheap alarm clock to show that the energy coiled in the mainspring can be transmitted without much loss, if any. I'll have to determine any such losses later, gentlemen. Next we will send a standard radio vacuum tube to show that not only can a whole horde of elements and compounds be transmitted, but that a vacuum can be maintained, even though the reconstruction takes place in the presence of an atmosphere. Finally—"

"Let's see the first thing first," grunted Higgins impatiently.

Peter nodded and swallowed.

"This is the transmitter-end," he said. The thick concrete wall is to protect operator and spectators from the radiation that comes from my bombardment. The receiving end needs no such shielding because all the hard gamma that passes across the intervening space is of such a short wavelength that it passes freely without any resonant absorption or interception. Once the beam converges, all of the energy is used in reconstructing the original atom. Ergo, no free radiation."

Peter sat down at the control desk. He fiddled with switches and dials until meters read to his satisfaction. In a large plate glass mirror hung above the shield, he and the visitors could see over the concrete barrier.

From a block-shaped enclosure there came a thin pencil of bright blue ionization. The line passed through the space between four large magnet-windings and a circular focus-coil. The beam came to a sharp, brilliant point an inch above the surface of a polished metal table.

"That is the prime focus," explained Peter. "It is at rest, but now I start the sweep circuits."

He pressed one button and the point of focus became a horizontal line while the converging beam changed from a true cone to a wedge-shaped figure, circular in cross section at the magnet-assembly and knife-edged above the table.

"Next, the vertical," said Peter. The wedge-shaped beam and the knife edge changed to become a square of brightness above the table. The cone of radiation became a transition-surface from circle to square as it crossed the space between magnet and tabletop.

"Now the traverse." The square of brightness dimmed and spread out to form a cube.

"We scan the volume like a three dimensional television raster," explained Peter. "Line after line moves down along a plane, and at the bottom of each plane the raster starts again at the top of the next plane." He eyed a couple of oscilloscope tubes critically. "This equipment has never been in full operation before," he said. "But it seems to be operating properly. So I will now put the first object—this cube of iron—on the transmitting table and send it out across the laboratory to be reassembled."

Peter shut the whole thing off with a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

single snap and disappeared around the edge of the shield. They saw him come into the enclosure from behind; in the mirror above, they saw him place the block of iron on the plate and set it very carefully. He left the shielded enclosure and was back in the open room in another half minute.

"Now!" he said with a feeling of mounting excitement.

Peter pressed the buton.

The blue bombardment hit the metal cube and there hazed out in all directions an aura of pale ionization. From the centrix of this aureole there fanned out a spreading cone of blue that faded to invisibility as the spread reached the surface of the large parabolic reflector.

"The matter transmitter seems to be working perfectly," said Peter with a careful reading of his meters.

Walter Higgins snorted. He waved his cigar toward the far end of the laboratory. "How is your matter receiver doing?"

IT WAS hard to tell. It was quite a distance off and it was clouded in a haze of light. From the parabolic reflector there converged a cone of the same-looking blue ionization. The intensity grew until it tortured the eyeball. Above a small metal table was the focal point, a volume of blue-violet light so bright that its outlines could not be determined by the human eye.

"I should have provided dark glasses," said Peter apologetically. "But I didn't know it would be that bright."

Walter Higgins turned to one of his visitors. "Forsyth," he ordered, "Go out and get a dozen pair of dark sunglasses. And hurry!"

"Yes, sir!"

Peter gulped. Higgins had just snapped an order to the executive vice-president of one of his companies. Not a request, a flat order. Forsyth disappeared in a hurry. Peter almost expected Higgins to take a hundred from his wallet for petty cash, but Higgins was obviously going to permit his executive vice-president to pay for the glasses himself.

Then the blue haze dimmed.

Down the laboratory the converging cone died. A bright yellow glow remained on the table and a curl of dirty smoke rose. Peter led the dash down the laboratory and got there just in time to see the last of a small dusty pile of gray-black dust turn to thin ash. He poked at the miserable pile with the end of a pencil and watched the dusty ash collapse. He spread the ash around on the metal plate.

"Where," asked Walter Higgins in a sharp voice, "is your metal cube?"

Peter poked at the spreading pile of ash. "Here," he said in a shaken voice. "This is—I don't—it must have—"

Mr. Harrison, the Vice-President In Charge Of Engineering and Research of the Higgins Development Company elbowed his way through the small group and picked up a pinch of the ash between thumb and forefinger. He abraded it gently, felt of the texture. He sniffed it gingerly, put a pinch in the palm of one hand and rubbed it with a forefinger.

"I would say offhand that this stuff is black iron oxide. Ferrous oxide, caused by exposing the pyprophoric powder of iron to the oxygen of the atmosphere," said the man, whose sometime engineering education had not been entirely lost in his later preoccupation with financial and administrative duties.

"Do go on," sneered Higgins.

"Well, from this demonstration I would say that Mr. Mansfield most definitely did demonstrate the transmission of matter, or an equivalent of the art," said Harrison firmly. "There was no iron here at the beginning of the demonstration, there is now."

"You call that stuff iron?" snapped Higgins.

"It was. It was undoubtedly one of the forms of finely divided iron, possibly monatomic from Mr. Mansfield's explanation. Of course, monatomic iron will oxidize immediately unless pro-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tected by some reducing atmosphere."

"A fine demonstration. We send a block of iron and receive a pile of iron oxide."

"Ferrous oxide," said Harrison absently.

"What's the damned difference?" glowered Higgins.

Still absently, Harrison said, "Ferrous oxide is FeO, whereas there are other forms, for instance ferric oxide, Fe203, and ferroso oxide, Fe304. Then—"

"Shut up!" snapped Higgins.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you got anything that won't burn?" asked Higgins of Peter Mansfield.

"I have a couple of things. Say—how's about a glass paperweight?"

"Get going. Let's see it!"

III

PETER got the paperweight and set the equipment going again just as Forsyth returned with a dozen dark sunglasses in leather cases. He had bought the best that the finances of the vast Higgins holdings could get without having them made especially. He took one pair from Forsyth and looked at them before he put them on. They were the high-grade jobs with polished lenses set in gold-filled frames; they cost about fifteen dollars a pair, complete with leather case and a wisp of chamois to keep them clean. They were coated-glass, and fifteen dollars times twelve pair added up to a hundred and eighty bucks worth of what Higgins would have called 'petty cash'! And Peter could not even afford to take Norma Higgins dancing.

Peter Mansfield pressed the big button again and they watched the receiving end intently. Through the dark glasses, they saw the focal point of the receiver as a bright glow that (due to the retention of vision) made a small vertical square plane come into being, to move swiftly back across the table. It disappeared at the end of its traverse. And from the swift-moving plane of bright blue radiance there poured an ultra-fine silt.

Again, a small pyramid of palpable dust decorated the receiving table.

"Well, young man, how do you explain this?" stormed Higgins.

Harrison fingered the dust and said, "Indubitably, this is glass."

Higgins turned on the executive angrily. "Indubitably you are an imbecile! It was glass. It is now a mass of worthless powder." He turned on Mansfield again. "Maybe," he said cynically, "you'd like to try my wrist watch?"

He held the watch out on his fingertips. It was platinum, exquisitely tiny, and it had thirty-six jewels; twenty three in the works, twelve diamonds in place of the hour-glass figures, and one in the hub of the hands. On the back, although Peter could not see it, was an inscription that said this was a gift from the board of directors in honor of ten years of active financial machinations that had resulted in collecting one of the largest economic empires in the world.

Peter backed away from the bauble. It had probably cost more money than the total amount of money that Peter Mansfield had ever seen, handled, or earned in the course of his thirty years of age.

"Afraid?" roared Higgins in a peal of sarcastic laughter.

"When I get this working," said Peter firmly, "I'll accept your offer, Mr. Higgins. As it is—well—"

"As it is, try your damned cheap alarm clock!" snapped Higgins, putting the watch back on his wrist and winding it ceremoniously. It did have a self-winding movement, but the self-wind could be augmented by stem winding if and when the watch was parked on a dresser for more than forty eight hours.

Peter looked unhappy. "There's no point—"

"I said try it! Who's paying for it?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Peter shrugged. He put the dollar alarm clock on the transmitting stand, fired up his equipment and watched the receiver with a sinking heart. As the transmitting plane passed through the clock, it alternately puffed in a billow of bright glowing smoke, collapsed in dull dimming flame, erupted again, and—Peter thought that it must have been when the plane passed through the mainspring—hurled a streamer of bright burning carbon and iron colored flame around and around in a tiny circle like a firework pinwheel. Something should have gone '*spang!*' when a shapeless blob of scintillation arched through the air like a miniature skyrocket, to die before it hit the floor.

THERE was copper in the clock, alloyed as brass, that burned bright green. There was carbon and there was iron and there was nickel and there was a chromium colored flame as the trim hit the air. It was a fine pyrotechnic display, and that which did not burn as a monatomic element in air powdered the receiver plate as the same mixed powder. The powder had lumps this time when elements with an affinity for one another combined on the plate.

Higgins strode down the length of the room, picked up a small handfull of the mixed dust and turned to Mr. Harrison. He hurled the dust at the man and snarled, "I suppose this pile of garbage is an alarm clock?"

Harrison wiped his face. "It was once," he said.

"Carthage was a city before the Romans burned it," snarled Higgins angrily. "And this—" he hurled the butt of his cigar on the laboratory floor, "—was once a cigar. Bah! Matter transmitter!"

Harrison shook his head. "Don't blame me for Mansfield's failure," he said slowly. "He's missed something, somewhere. The fact remains that Mansfield has succeeded in transmitting matter, no matter how it comes out."

"Yeah," sneered Higgins scornfully. "But this pile of original dust isn't what we were paying for. So what's he missed but the main point of the whole experiment? All Mansfield's done is to do on a large scale what they did fifty years ago. Reduced an atom to radiation and then caused the radiation to reduce back into the original atom. Mansfield just did it with a pound of matter instead of a millimicrogram in a cloud chamber."

"But Mr. Higgins," said Peter hopefully, "doesn't the fact that I did transmit matter prove that the project is feasible? All I have to do now is to discover the way of transmitting whatever field of force or basic energy is required to maintain the original form of the object. Whatever binding energy holds the atoms together, one to the next, to create the whole object."

"Do go on."

"Nothing was ever invented in a hurry. I've shown my original premise to be true—"

"Hell's eternal bells! They did that fifty years ago. You've just added a useless scanner and a couple of parabolic reflectors."

"But remember that this is the first demonstration. I admit that I thought that I had it licked. But now that I know there's something missing, I can devote time to—"

"Time you can devote, but no more of the Higgins bankroll."

"Peter," said Norma Higgins, softly, "I—"

"And you won't either, young woman!"

"You can't—!"

"The hell I can't! Thomason! You will see that Miss Higgins' drawing account is limited to one hundred dollars per week until further notice!"

"Yes sir."

"And that, young lady, is hardly enough to keep you in nylons."

"Dad! You couldn't!"

"I've just done it. Now, gentlemen, let's leave this sorry demonstration. We've got work to do."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Higgins strode out with his sycophants following.

Norma looked downcast. "Peter?" she asked.

"What can I say?" he replied. "I've tried and I've failed." He swiped his hand across the receiving table and came up with a handful of the impalpable dust. He fingered it in the palm of his hand, pushing some of the powder over the edge. It fell towards the floor in a cloud but did not drop; it filtered down more like a heavy gas, diffusing and spreading and being held in midair by the motion of the atmosphere. Now and then a microscopic flash of light came as a mote of it burned.

"There," he said bitterly, "falls the ashes of my future."

Norma blinked back sympathetic tears.

"Peter, you must have read that line in a mellerdrammer," she said in an attempt at levity that fell flat.

"Maybe so," he told her. "But this is where I stop."

"Peter, you've got to continue!"

"How?"

"I—" Norma stopped. "Peter," she asked gently, "If I can outmaneuver daddy, would you let me help?"

HE LOOKED down at here. There was a sting in his eyes and he knew that if he weren't careful, tears would form and spill down his cheeks. He couldn't speak, but Norma said it for him.

"Peter, you've got faith in this thing. Why can't you let me have some, too? I've got faith in you, Peter. I admire your determination, I like your mind. No man could have done what you've done—"

"Done?" he exploded bitterly, "All I've done is to make an imbecile of myself."

Norma reached up and put a gentle hand on his mouth. "You've faith in yourself, I've got faith in you. Now, will you let me help?"

Slowly he shook his head.

"Peter! You fool. You and your cockeyed sense of social values. Don't you see that no matter what, no matter how widely separated two people are at the beginning and no matter in what way, they can be happy together only if each brings something that the other needs and has not got?"

"That's just book—"

Norma clung to him for a moment. "Peter, listen to me. You have the completely crazy notion that you want to hand me the world on a silver plate. I don't want the material world on any kind of plate. I've had everything I've wanted ever since I could point at things in store windows. You seem to think my sense of value is determined by the number of dollars available. It isn't. I—"

"You'll have precious little money once your father puts a close rein on the cashbox," said Peter harshly.

"I can circumvent father," said Norma angrily. "My problem is circumventing that warped thing you call your pride. Peter, I can bring to you a good deal more than the temporal finances you need to make this project a success; and in turn you can give me what I've been seeking."

"What—?"

"I want a man," she cried. "Not any man. Not a man who wines and dines me with one eye on my bankbook, or one of my social contemporaries whose family finances obviate his avarice but whose family finances also take all ambition away from him. I—you emotional adolescent—happen to want you. On any terms."

Peter put an arm around her waist and then took it away fast. The film of monatomic dust from his hand made a shadowy print on her dress. He started to brush it off.

"You and your distorted set of economic values," she laughed. She scooped up a handful of the dust and rubbed it in his hair, then started to run her fingers through it. She obviously got amusement out of this. Norma scooped up another film of dust and sprinkled

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it on the front of her dress. "Dust *that* off, Peter," she said. "Dare you!"

Peter blushed.

Norma wailed, "Peter, are you actually afraid to touch me?"

He couldn't reply.

Angrily, Norma stepped back and said, "How much will you take for a caress?"

"You—" he choked up, unable to compete with her swift change in emotions.

She changed again. She came forward into his arms and held him close. "Peter," she breathed, "once you told me that the job of any man involved in any of the sciences was at least ninety-eight percent frustration. So many things that never work. So the job of a scientist's wife must be to smooth over those frustrations. To keep him in action. To keep him getting up every morning with determination to go out and tackle the job that licked him yesterday. And the man's response must be that when he is happy, his wife can share his success. Now, can I help?"

He looked down at her. There were tears hanging on the brim of her large eyes, her body was soft and clinging, as though she were afraid to let go. He looked at her and he knew that he was a man who had lost his pride because he was at last willing to accept help from any source.

"Yes," he said in a strained voice.

Norma's body throbbed with new vitality, although the tears she had been holding back suddenly welled out and came streaming down. She held him close and gave him her lips for a long time. She kissed away his own hurt and his own failure and in turn regained her own happy dream of future. Then they parted very gently and were not quite willing to look one another in the eye.

"I've got to run," she said at last. She shook her head unhappily. "I've got to go and get a few things done before dad can pull the string."

"I—"

"It's my worry and I'll do the worrying," she said firmly. "Your job is to go back to work and see what you missed in this doodad. Promise?"

"I—"

Norma's tears dried up swiftly. "We're a fine combination so long as we both let each other do his own particular job," she said, catching his hand and holding it tight. "You make with the mechanics and I'll make with the finances, and if we can both do those at the same time, we'll have time between to make love. But I've got to get going, Peter."

He watched her go.

Then he turned back to his equipment. He felt like kicking the bombarder, but he knew that the block of concrete that shielded the bombarder would protect the instrument; in fact, the concrete was probably harder than the device itself. He would only hurt himself by such a show of childish anger.

He considered the whole gear analytically. Something was missing. The binding force that connected atom to atom and molecule to molecule had not been properly transmitted.

IV

IN THE days that followed, Peter Mansfield re-read all the books he could find on binding energies. He studied meson theory and he computed packing fraction energies. He bombarded elements as pure as he could find, and he measured the resultant gamma radiation as close as he could measure it. Something was missing, all right. The binding force radiated off in a random pattern that he could not collect and direct through his parabolic reflector. Neutrinos were spinning off at any odd angle; positron holes sucked in corrective energies; he even detected the evanescent negatron as it came into being and dissipated in a gout of annihilation energy.

He caught what looked like the evidence of the proposed but never detected

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

anti-neutron, although he himself was far from sure just how anything could consist of factors which were opposite to zero charge and positive mass. He looked into the abstract often, and at one period he tried to reconcile the rather high-altitude suggestion that the positron, the positive electron, was equivalent to the usual electron traveling backwards in time. All the math available said that there was no way of telling one concept from the other; that the effects of a positron would be the same as the effect of an electron in reversed timefield. This completely abstract concept also covered the negatron and the anti-neutron.

Peter abandoned the concept of nuclear time fields and picked up the meson theory. He studied spin and angular momentum and tried to correlate the energies involved in spin and binding forces.

He got into crystallography and into the lattice structure of regular crytsalline masses and into the theory of amorphous substances. His trail led him through the study of distorted crystalline structure and semi-fractured crystalline regeneration. At one time he found himself absorbed in a study of machining versus coining and although he knew why and how a rolled, or coined, screw thread was stronger than a cut thread, he read the whole article again and got new hope from it.

Peter sent many things through his equipment, which he now called his "Matter Reducer" and he studied the results analytically.

He was busy; he was completely occupied from awakening to bedtime, and in order to take his next important step forward, Peter cut down on his sleeping time. He worked and he studied almost eighteen hours a day. He ate with one hand and used the other to turn the pages of his books; sometimes he did not eat. He existed on cans of soup and loaves of sliced bread because they took little time to prepare. He consumed jars of peanut butter and crackers by the package. Now and then he would take time off to munch an apple, taking time off because apple juice made it rather awkward to handle a book at the same time. He shaved when his face became uncomfortable; although he bathed regularly, most of the bathing was a case of shocking himself awake after too little sleep by a deluge of water. Now and then he would go to sleep with his book on his lap, to wake up a few hours later and resume his study.

IT WAS ten days before he realized that he had not seen Norma since their last parting, and even this he did not realize until she came to his laboratory and found him haggard from loss of sleep and thin from overwork and undereating.

Norma herself was a bit haggard. But she brightened when she saw Peter. She came in softly and happily and kissed him sweetly. He held her with the clutch of a man submersed in the troubles of the world, hanging on to a sweet fragment of sanity. Norma responded to him for a minute and then put him back gently. She dropped into a chair opposite him and put her head back listlessly.

"Been rough," she said.

"Rough?" he growled. Somehow he could not grasp the notion that anything could be rough to a person who had money, either potential or actual, at the fingertips. Rough to Peter Mansfield meant the constant search for a factor that he could not fathom.

"Pappy is a smooth, sharp operator," said Norma. "He's been manipulating strings, people, and corporations so long that he does it naturally. He and that lily-livered investment genius of his cut off my drawing account like turning off a water faucet, but they couldn't block my handling of my own personal stock. I took a flier in the market, Peter, before they got there. In fact," she chuckled, "I knew what they'd do, so I started to sell short before they got into the game. Then, the pair of schem-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing scoundrels didn't cheat fair." Norma's smile faded into anger. "Instead of running the stock down so I'd take a large loss, they bought like madmen and made it rise so I had to damn near lose my scanties covering my short sale. I almost got even by dumping the block of one stock, and it must've cost pappy plenty. A hell of a lot more than just tossing the money away. But I did get out with a half million or so. Peter, will you take it—for me? For—us?"

"But—what does that leave you with?"

Norma got up out of her seat and came across the small room to snuggle down in his lap. "It leaves me with a hundred bucks a week—and you. I'll give up the hundred a week for you every hour of the day and night."

He had to grin. "Bad bet, darling. I'm no closer to being a howling success than I was a couple of weeks ago."

She kissed him generously. "I'd rather have you as my failure than see you as someone else's success."

"Dog in the manger."

"Don't you call me a b—!" she reddened.

Peter laughed. His laughter felt good inside of him, and he found a corner of his mind wondering why. He did not realize that he had been working much too hard, that his overworked brain and nervous system was almost in a state bordering on hysteria. His whole system was crying for relief, and he would have laughed like a madman at spectacles that his normal attitude would have considered banal. His mind was tired, far more exhausted than the body that sat there expending its energy in reading and studying and turning the pages of a book. A bit of physical effort—a *lot* of physical effort—was needed to maintain his healthy balance. Norma squirmed into a more comfortable position and Peter's body recognized the probable avenue of physical expenditure and responded vigorously. In fact, his mind (the subconscious side) saw the possibility of taking a rest while the physical went to work and urged him to grab the chance. His conscious mind objected mildly and then went to sleep, so far as any guardianship of his morals and pride were concerned. Peter relaxed with Norma in his arms and enjoyed the pleasant sensation of not giving a purple damn about anything but the high probability of gaining that soft, floating-on-nothing sensation that comes with complete surfeit of all energy.

He sought her mouth and floated.

His mind was a dizzy maelstrom, lucid at times when he recognized her presence, completely foggy at other times when he half-dozed, at which time he dreamed bizarre dreams about strange doors opening and wet flagstone walks that led in aimless courses through formal gardens. When his consciousness came up again he wondered what the symbolism meant but he was too tired to figure it out. Eventually he slept deep and long.

HE AWOKE to bright daylight streaming through the windows of his room. He wondered how he had managed to cover the couple of hundred feet from the bookshelf in the laboratory to the studio couch in the back room, and then he came a bit more alive and remembered Norma. Had she—?

"Awake, Peter?" she called from the doorway.

He fumbled for an answer, not only to her question because he was not sure, but also to the more important question that he posed for his own mind.

"Ah—er—"

"You're a sleepyhead. A hell of a fine lover you are." Norma laughed. "I come to give you a half million bucks, and all I ask is that you pay attention to me. What do you do? You accept my half million in a half-conscious manner and then you go to sleep."

"Norma, I—"

"Peter," she said sternly, "for five hundred thousand clams, the least a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

girl should have to do is defend her honor. If my old broken-down honor isn't worth a half-million, I'll give the damn thing away. So there!"

Peter stretched in a luxurious yawn; he realized that he hadn't felt so good for a rather long time. He grinned at her. "Look," he said. "You've got this thing all wrong. It's the wolfish male that turns the virgin's head with the half-million and tries to violate her honor. Not—"

"Buster, shut up. You went to sleep, remember?"

He sat up in bed abruptly. "Norma—I didn't—?"

"No, dammit, you didn't. You went, dammit, to sleep instead. If I, dammit, hadn't gotten tired and hungry waiting for you to sleep it off, I'd not have started to brew breakfast. Now, dammit, that I've constructed coffee; ham and eggs, and orange juice in self preservation, you'll wait. So help me."

Peter grinned. "Can't I, dammit, have both?"

She blew a stray wisp of hair out of her eyes.

"First things first. First you'll eat, to build up your strength. After that, if you can keep your nose out of a book, we'll see about the rest. Now—"

The doorbell rang like the sounding of a fire warning. It made both of them jump. The ringing was followed by a heavy fist beating on a panel of the door.

"I don't know what this is all about," said Peter. "But I don't like that official-sounding method of attack." He climbed out of the studio couch, blushed when he realized that he was clad in his shorts and wristwatch and realized that he may or may not have undressed, probably not.

"In there," he said, pointing at a side room. "And if someone touches that doorknob, you go out through the back door but fast!"

"Yes, Peter," said Norma. She lifted her face and responded to his brief kiss with a vigor that left him pleasantly wobbly at the knees. But Norma was well concealed by the time Peter opened the door for Mr. Forsyth, the Executive Vice-President of Everything Else and another character, the latter of vast muscular proportions.

"Ah, Mr. Mansfield. I hoped you'd be in. Have you time to consult with us?"

"A bit," said Peter uncertainly. The size of Forsyth's associate removed any and all notions of objection, either physical or verbal impertinence. He stood aside and let them enter.

"This is a rather unique place you have here," observed Forsyth, eyeing the laboratory in general.

PETER nodded, wondering why Forsyth bothered to comment. He had been there before and he had seen it all. He said, not because he wanted to explain, but because Forsyth had left a very awkward silence that Peter wanted filled, "Once, it was an automobile sales room. The last of the big plush jobs. It had 'a ladies' powder room and a nursery to take care of the kids whilst mother picked out the upholstery to match her dress, a bar for father to half-anaesthetise himself in before he signed the check, and concealed way back in the rear was a vast area filled with repairmen and spare parts. It went idle after too many customers had their crates worked on in the back. Sit down, Mr. Forsyth, and we'll confer. What's on your mind?"

"Mr. Mansfield, I am here on a rather distressing mission."

"Distressing?"

"Indeed, and it pains me."

"I'll bet. So—?"

"You have, you must admit, failed to produce, you know."

Peter nodded slowly. "My first attempt was a rather puny as a success. However, I'd not call it a howling flop, Mr. Forsyth."

"Perhaps not, but you have not produced the answer or corrective measures."

"These things take time. Research

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cannot be scheduled, no one can stand off and state that at such-and-such a time, following x-number of man hours of work, he will come up with some basic discovery."

"I must admit that you are probably right. However, I must point out that you are not keeping your contract."

"Not keeping my contract?"

"You signed a contract to produce a matter transmitter for Mr. Higgins."

"Oh. Well, look, Mr. Forsyth, I was under the supposition that I would be granted more time. After all, I did transmit matter, you know."

Mr. Forsyth nodded very slowly. "This I saw. Now, Mr. Mansfield, have you been able to think up any logical, profitable use for your device as it stands as of today?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Nothing?"

"No. At first I thought that perhaps the thing might be successful in the preparation of finely divided powders. My trouble is that I've divided them too finely. No one really wants a molecular or atomic powder. Strange things happen. Elements that burn in air can be collected in helium, then one of two things happens. Either the stuff rewelds itself together again in a shapeless mass because of its own internal atomic affinity for itself, or it burns as soon as you remove the helium. I must admit that I am a failure so far. However, I do wish to point out that nothing was ever done in a hurry and I feel confident that—"

FORSYTH held up a hand to stem Peter's tongue. "The difficulty may lie in the lack of a co-ordinated effort," said Forsyth.

"Co-ordinated effort? What do you mean?"

"The contract you signed to produce a matter transmitter also stipulated that you were to be given free reign. You have hired no one else to help, possibly in fear that someone might steal your ideas. Mr. Higgins believes that this device should, at this point, be turned over to a complete laboratory staff for study and eventual development."

"And what do I get out of it?" demanded Peter.

"You will be paid handsomely."

"How much?"

"As of this morning at nine-thirty, the Higgins Enterprises has generously signed the tab for two million, three hundred and thirty-five thousand, eight hundred and six dollars and fifty-five cents," said Forsyth, consulting a small notebook. "As of one week ago Thursday, your contract-time had expired without producing any form of acceptable device for the wireless transmission of material objects. The terms of your contract state that if you fail, you then become liable for the entire financial backing."

Peter went white. "This is the way Higgins has collected just about everything!" he stormed, jumping to his feet. Then Peter remembered the strong, silent member of the duo, and subsided nervously. Mr. Forsyth's large associate, however, had not moved a muscle. Peter had to admit that his attitude indicated a complete self-assurance that his battleship-mass was enough to prevent any uprising.

Peter went on less angrily, "This is no way to act. I've done my job honestly and to the best of my ability, and therefore if I meet with a setback, due to some factor that I couldn't foresee, then—"

"The point you name is the point we are trying to make," interrupted Forsyth smoothly. "We wonder whether the 'best of your ability' is of a caliber high enough to conquer the rather difficult task you set for yourself."

"Now see here—"

"Please. We are not blaming you. Industry, science, and the very foundation of civilization itself needs a proper proportion of thinkers, dreamers, and men whose sights are set intolerably high. These are the men who, like Ein-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stein, propose abstract concepts, the practical use of which is obscure. Sometimes for years and years. I am certain that James Clerk Maxwell, for instance, had nothing financial in mind when he proposed the mathematics that are the cornerstone of radio and communications. Such may be the case with you, Mansfield."

Peter grunted. "Are you comparing me to Maxwell, Einstein and maybe B. Franklin?" asked Peter scornfully.

"I am trying to. Maybe you deserve it, Mansfield. But you've got to realize that we hardly feel it desirable to wait for another half-hundred years before your discoveries here can be made financially sound."

"Meaning?"

"We're back to this again. It is very simple. Perhaps you don't care to face the facts, Mansfield. The facts are these: We admit that yours is not a complete failure; that you have provided a basic concept and a good springboard from which to leap into possible engineering and ultimate exploitation. Therefore, since your contract calls for this development to remain in your complete control, we are willing to barter. Sign us a waiver, Mr. Mansfield, and we will cancel our contract without further exchange of considerations."

"Get it down to my level," growled Peter.

"Flatly stated, we are paying you better than two and a quarter million for your efforts, ideas, and equipment to date."

V

PETER eyed Forsyth thoughtfully. "If Higgins Enterprises is willing to pay me that much, then someone must have some plans for the future," he said slowly. "My answer is no!"

"Come now, Mr. Mansfield, you can't be as stubborn as that."

"I can and I am."

"Then you leave me with no recourse. Mr. Black, please—?"

The large man got out of his chair easily and came forward, reaching in his inside pocket. "You are Peter Mansfield?"

"I—yes—?"

"Peter Mansfield, accept this court notification of judgment," said the man called Black.

Peter, blankly, put out a hand and the process landed in the palm. Black let go of it and Peter had it.

"Read it," urged Forsyth.

Peter opened it and skimmed down the first page. "For the benefit of my thick head, maybe you'd better explain this in layman's terms."

"It merely states that due to your inability to comply with the terms of your contract—namely to produce a device that will cause material objects to be transmitted without handling, defined as a matter transmitter, and more carefully outlined in the contract itself—you are therefore declared in forfeit and the indemnity clause is being enforced."

"Indemnity clause?"

"Yes, if I must repeat myself. It calls for the return, upon demand, of all monies accountable, subject to a formal audit later."

Peter snorted. "Look," he said crossly, "if I'd had that couple of cold million in the first place I'd not have bothered Higgins. So now you expect me to write you a check for two million, three hundred and some thousand? Or," he sneered bitterly, "would you prefer it in cash? One dollar bills be all right, Mr. Forsyth? Or perhaps you prefer it in tens?"

"Please, let's not be facetious. This is a serious matter."

"So? And what am I expected to do about it?" stormed Peter.

"You'll just have to comply with the orders of the court."

Peter eyed the large process server. "Do you know any law?" he asked plaintively.

"Damn little. I'm no lawyer."

"Can anybody slap a sight-demand

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on anybody for a wad like this?"

"How should I know? Get a lawyer and ask him."

Peter eyed Forsyth. "Have you anything to say?" he demanded. "Is this a sight-demand, and shall I call the newspapers and inform them that Boss Higgins is taking another hunk of unprotected land for his empire?"

Forsyth smiled wolfishly. "You're impetuous, young man. Shows the impatience of youth. Frankly, Mansfield, this is no illegal squeeze, nor is it a legal squeeze. You have your alternatives, and you will be granted a reasonable length of time to prepare and deliver an answer."

"And what does the court consider a reasonable length of time?"

"Ten days."

"And if I don't take your offer?"

Forsyth smiled. "You have no recourse. The court will insist upon an equitable settlement. Higgins feels that a great amount of generosity is being shown by merely writing 'paid in full' across your account ledger in return for your lofty ideas, plans and dreams, including this laboratory and its contents, with one more small proviso: That in turning this project over to Higgins, you will agree not to go into later competition."

"I'll see Higgins in—"

"I'd advise you to say nothing rash until you've thought it over." Forsyth rose to go and the process server followed like a destroyer screen.

Peter Mansfield let them go out unguided.

As the door slammed, Norma came in from the other room. He looked at her unhappily. "Now what?" he said.

"I've still got some money, Peter."

HE NODDED glumly. "At this moment I'd take it if it were enough. But I'll not throw your offering down the hatch, Norma."

"Let 'em have this fool mess," she said angrily. "Let them take it and welcome. I've still got enough to get by for a long time, and you can always get another idea. We'll work together, Peter."

He shook his head. "I hate to think that your father and his bunch can think up a use for this doodad while I can't."

Norma shook her head slowly. "He hasn't any use for it, Peter," she said slowly.

"Nonsense! He wouldn't be trying to put the squeeze on if he really thought it worthless."

"Yes he would. He would happily toss a couple of million in the sewer just to prove to me that you aren't a capable operator."

"Maybe I'm not."

Norma came over, pushed him into his chair, and parked herself in his lap. "Maybe you're not," she said softly. "Father always grades people in terms of money. He forgets that his money can buy most anything but brains, and those he feels that he can hire."

Peter grunted. "I've heard it said that nothing was ever useless. Somewhere there's got to be a use for this gizmo, even in its imperfect state."

"Can I help?"

Peter shook his head ruefully. He even essayed a sickly grin. "Sure," he said with a bitter laugh, "think up a use for a contraption that eats coal and delivers lampblack divided so fine it oxidizes in air. Water becomes a cloud of steam that condenses all over the place. I've made nascent oxygen, hydrogen, and the like, but this is hardly a problem these days, and the commercial companies have methods that do not involve a super betatron that delivers enough gamma to disintegrate atoms. I've considered it as a weapon, but what enemy would stand still while you brought a thousand ton gravis up, set it in operation, and went to work on him? You'd do better puncturing him to death with blunt toothpicks."

"Peter—"

"Yes?"

"Don't be so bitter. You have ten

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

days to think of something."

"Ten days? That's two hundred and thirty-odd thousands bucks per day I've got to dig up to keep my hands on this project. Dammit, Norma, I don't mind failure and frustration because I know that I can make it work. Someday. I just hate to bring it this far and then lose it forever."

"You mustn't!"

"No? Well, that's what I'm facing unless I can find some use for a gizmo that takes in fabricated material and gives out with a mass of the component atoms, molecules, and the resulting heat of recombination of the primitive elements. I—"

Peter stopped and looked over Norma's shoulder. She wriggled around to follow his gaze and found that he was staring wide-eyed at a blank place on the wall. She turned back and blocked his stare with her own face.

"Peter?"

"I just had a glimmer of an idea."

"From where?"

"From what I said last. Look, Norma, how much of that half million have you got with you?"

Norma looked bright. "All of it," she said.

"I mean cash."

"Yes." She got off Peter's lap and found her large handbag, and from it Norma dumped out a rather awesome sheaf of greenbacks. Then she saw Peter's jaw hanging at half mast.

He said dumbly, "You'd go wandering around with a half a million dollars in cash in a handbag?"

"Why, er, why not? It's mine, isn't it?"

Perhaps it might not have been more than ten or fifteen minutes earlier that Peter Mansfield might have been impressed. He might have been forced to compare himself with the background of a girl who took a half-million-worth of dollars in greenbacks—even fifty-cent dollars—and stuffed them in a handbag. Peter had never seen a thousand dollar bill; Norma had a wad of them, a batch of ten-thousands, and two of the very rare fifty G type. Peter didn't even know who Salmon P. Chase was, let alone recognize the venerable gentleman's engraving on the fifty G.

But at this moment, Peter Mansfield was too busy with his own thoughts to compare himself with Norma and wonder how a man who was strapped to buy a good dinner could run in the company of a girl who thought nothing of going around loaded high enough to endow a college library wing, in cool cash.

"About five hundred," he said absently.

"Take a thousand," she said, handing him a bill.

He looked at it and laughed. "I should shove this under a ticket window and ask for change?"

"Peter, tell me?"

He looked down at her cheerfully. "Nope," he said. "Not until you're Mrs. Peter Mansfield."

Norma looked up, startled and hurt. "Peter!" she cried. Then what he had said caught her in another way and she looked eager. "Peter," she asked softly, "is this a proposal?"

He nodded. "We can do the deed on the way, and I'll tell you all about it after I carry you across that threshold."

Norma laughed happily. "You'd best tell me between the Justice and the honeymoon suite," she said. "You'll be too busy after that. Come on, Peter, let's go!"

IT WAS exactly ten days later, almost precisely to the hour. The laboratory had changed a bit, but not greatly. There were some additions that couldn't possibly have been missed, but for the most part, it looked the same.

But the stage had been set, the preparations had been made, and the whole program had been concluded satisfactorily. It had almost been rehearsed, and it might have been if the main characters had been willing to rehearse. Or if they had known what was going on.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The doorbell rang and Peter grinned at his bride of ten days.

This time Forsyth was accompanied by Higgins and a couple of the board of directors, introduced stiffly by Forsyth as a Mr. Barnett, Vice-President In Charge of Legal Matters, and a Mr. Hammond, Assistant To Mr. Barnett.

"Well, young man," coughed Mr. Higgins. "You've made up your mind?"

"I have," nodded Peter cheerfully. "But at the moment I am in the middle of a rather interesting experiment. Have I your indulgence for the next —" Peter eyed his watch "—sixteen minutes?"

Higgins snorted. "I suppose so," he said grudgingly. "If you've anything practical to add to this mess, go right ahead, Mansfield."

Forsyth, who had been looking around the laboratory, spotted the new additions. "What are those?" he asked.

Peter tapped one, a large cylindrical tank. "Hydrazine," he said, patting it fondly on its flank. He pointed to the other, a bit too far away to touch because of the size. "Nitric acid."

"What kind of fool experiment are you going to do?" demanded Higgins. "I warn you, Mansfield—er, Mr. Barnett, you warn him about destruction of property."

"Mr. Mansfield, I warn you that any attempt at the destruction of this equipment or this property is illegal, inasmuch as a lien has been placed upon it."

"What makes you think I'm going to dstroy anything?" demanded Peter.

"Nitric acid? And what's that other stuff?"

"Hydrazine."

"Must be corrosive."

"Oh, definitely. But—" a buzzer buzzed and Peter turned from the collection of vice-presidents and picked up a telephone near the operator's table. "Mansfield," he said crisply. "Yes sir! We're all ripe and ready!"

He pressed a button and a machine began to whir. Flow meters ran high on their scales. Straining to keep the tangled jumble of heavy pipes separated, they followed them with their eyes along the floor to where the pipes disappeared behind the thick concrete shield.

Then in the mirror above, they saw the same pipes join. One, they couldn't tell which one, expanded as the other curved to enter the larger pipe. Nor could they tell whether the smaller pipe ended at the wall of the larger or whether the smaller pipe went concentric inside the larger for the remaining six feet of distance. All that was visible was the vertical plane of Mansfield's matter transmitter and the end of the pipe, pouring its two-foot cascade of evil-looking liquid at the bright transmitting plane and disappearing.

AUTOMATICALLY, they looked to the far end of the laboratory, but the receiver was not there. The parabolic reflector of the transmitter, on second look, was pointed in a new angle. Where, none of the visitors could guess.

Peter eyed the meters and the flow gauges and nodded to himself.

"I've got a bit of time now," he said. "And it's also within your granted sixteen minutes of grace, Mr. Higgins. So permit me to take advantage of the quit-clause of our contract. I— put out your hand, dammit!—deliver to you my certified check for two million, three hundred thirty-five thousand, eight hundred and six dollars and fifty-five cents."

"Where did you get this? Do you think you can palm off—"

"It's certified," said Peter quietly.

"It— now see here, Mansfield, you can't do this—"

"Yes I can, and I'll ask your Mr. Barnett to back me up. You slapped a service on me, a notice that you were calling my contract in default. The quit-clause states clearly that in case of default upon my part that I have the alternative of reimbursing you in full within ten days after the call for termination, or that I turn over to you everything of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

value related to this contract, project, development, property and future holding. I choose the first alternative. Like the looks of my check?"

Higgins growled at the paper and went into a whispered consultation with Barnett. Peter sauntered to his equipment and scanned the meters and flow gauges casually. The humming machine had changed in pitch. It sounded now like a machine laboring over a huge, basso-resonant emptiness.

"Whatever you've done to earn this check," snapped Higgins, "will have to be proved a development made by you subsequent to the service of that termination notice. That is going to be tough. Men like you have been known to arrange a flat and dismal failure just to discourage a financier. You probably had this idea of yours in mind for a long time."

"I've got a reliable witness. A party you will find difficult to impugn. My wife—your daughter—"

Higgins roared. His face got red, and then turned an ugly red-purple. His voice croaked and choked into a whisper. And as he headed towards an attack of apoplexy, Norma came into the room and said:

"If you so much as suggest that Peter had this idea in mind before he did, I'll point out chapter and verse that you wilfully manipulated and juggled the stock market to strip me of funds. I'll attest to the fact that Peter did plead with Forsyth to extend the contract. I'll announce to the world that you've even accused my husband of being a kept man!"

"Then," snapped Higgins. "Explain how you came by this check?"

Peter eyed his equipment once more. The vast tanks were running out; only a few hundred gallons were left in each.

"Sure," he said easily. "I don't mind. The Mansfield Matter Transmitter couldn't send a housebrick across a yard of distance, but it isn't a full failure. Hydrazine and Nitric Acid is the propellant for rockets. The stuff reacts upon contact. So we send the propellant, being mixed, across space to the reaction motor. There we win, because we can send men across space, if we can't transmit a gold watch or a vacuum tube. This is the Mansfield Mass Transmitter. No steps to drop, no mass-ratio to worry about, no fuel tanks to carry. Follow?"

A THOUSAND miles to the East and five hundred miles in the sky, a blow-torch flame wickered and died as the last traces of fuel was sucked out of the tanks, hurled into the mass transmitter, and delivered to the combustion chamber of a reaction motor, already mixed and reacting. Peter shut off the equipment as the pumps clattered on a diet of air.

A spaceman sat in the unused fuel tank of the third section of a three stage rocket and fiddled lovingly with the mass-receiver. In a few hours they'd be receiving a course-correcting blast of power. For the present—

They had a hell of a lot of spare room.

A Feast of Science Fiction!

THROUGH THE BLACKBOARD by JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS

PI IN THE SKY by FREDRIC BROWN

***Plus L. Sprague de Camp, Murray Leinster, Cleve Cartmill and others in the July Issue of* FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE**

NOW ON SALE — 25c AT ALL STANDS!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paramount Pictures

Citizens hope the Army's atom bomb will stop the Martians

WORLDS at WAR

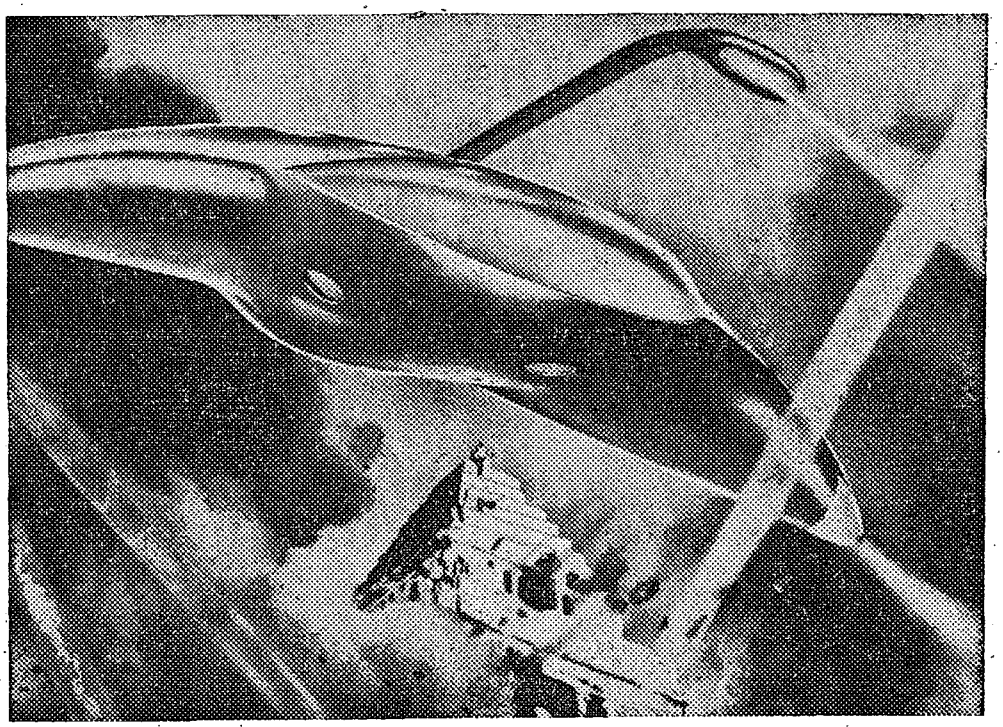
SPECIAL EFFECTS and vivid technicolor have transformed H. G. Wells' classic science fiction novel into Hollywood's first ex*terra*vaganza. Written in 1898, THE WAR OF THE WORLDS has been brought up-to-date by Paramount with the addition of fresh dialogue and a shift in locale from London to Los Angeles. It's even more impressive than Orson Welles' panic-provoking radio version.

The inhabitants of a small town in Southern California think they have witnessed the descent of a remarkably large and brilliant meteor. Curiosity quickly wanes in a flurry of Saturday night frivolity. Scientists, fishing nearby, are a little more concerned. When the Geiger counter they carry with their fishing tackle registers radioactivity they decide to investigate the strange intruder from space more closely.

The first men to see a strange, hooded shape loom fifteen feet above the "meteor" and scan the countryside are reduced to ashes by a deadly ray. An eerie, otherworldly, metallic sound breaks the silence of the country night. Ships, luminous and deadly, are supported on three pulsating beams to a height of thirty feet. The war is on. The menace mounts. Ships appear in strategic spots all over the globe. Protected by force fields, even the atom bomb proves powerless to halt the alien invasion. Earth is doomed. The unexpected ending may disappoint more ardent science fiction fans, but they'll agree that it's the best way to satisfy a general audience.

The Martian machines were solid enough to satisfy the most exacting critics. No flimsy props these. The destruction of Los Angeles and the innocuous effect of an atom

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Los Angeles City Hall is destroyed by Martian war machine

in TECHNICOLOR

bomb were the most spectacular scenes imaginable.

The fresh talents of Gene Barry and Ann Robinson in leading roles never once detracted from the overwhelming tragedy of an Earth threatened with total destruction. As two human beings caught up in a horror beyond comprehension they make the Martians even more sinister by contrast.

A prologue narrated by Sir Cedric Hardwicke sets the space stage perfectly. Drawings in the Bonestell style by Paramount artists are superb. For five months Gordon Jennings' special effects staff worked to execute artists' conceptions of Martians and their spaceships.

The mobile Martians are a far cry from the original "Puppetoons" with which producer George Pal entered the movie lists in 1939. In 1950 he switched to science fiction with such outstanding pictures as "Destination Moon" and "When Worlds Collide."

The atom bomb went off on cue with the aid of Walter Hoffman, eighty-one-year-old powder expert. Directed to condense the blast to the height of a studio stage, he complied with a pseudo-blast just seventy-five feet high.

Seen only for an instant, the Martian physiognomy was outstanding. Short body, long arms, three-fingered hands, a huge, pulsating head with a single, three-lensed eye. Quite a superior BEM.

All in all, this is the outstanding science fiction film made to date. The color, intelligent direction by Byron Haskin and remarkable art all point to finer, more-artistic science fiction movies in the future. We're glad to see it happening.

—*PAT JONES*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

METAMORPHOSIS

By MIKE CURRY

Only when the last man died would the dim wastes of Asmarad be less lonely

HIS name was Hrlec Brey. He was a big man, and he moved slowly as if he had all the time in the world.

And he had. He had all the time—years and years behind him, years and years ahead. And the world was his, its length and breadth, its skies and seas, the solitude of night, the loneliness of day.

He was eating dinner when the knowledge smashed across his mind: *Tonight I am going to die.*

He put down his leg of *ayala* and stared blankly at the plank wall across

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the room. That he was going to die did not disturb him. That he knew about it did. It was not whimsy that had crossed his mind. He was not given to idle speculation. It was as if a sense of precognition had suddenly developed in his intellect. It was a strange, irrevocable certainty.

His gaze fell on the half-eaten leg of *ayala,* and he shrugged. A crime to let it go to waste, impending death or not. He picked it up, moved his jaw slowly around the bone. So I'm going to die. Tomorrow I'll be free. Then his eyes hardened and his teeth tore savagely at the last bite of meat. *I haven't evolved.*

Moving slowly because the pains had been with him all day—he called them "pains" because there seemed no better word—he washed off the table and went out to the front porch of his small farmhouse on Ophiuchus VI to sit in the twilight and smoke his pipe. He was a man of fifty Earth years, whom age had weathered and work had bent, and the strongest thing about him was his will. He had willed to remain sane in his solitary world after the tragedy so many years before, and he had made it. Just made it. He did not even talk to himself.

He settled his bones in the log chair and planted his feet comfortably on the railing. He had willed that he could gaze upon this evening scene and believe it to be Earth. Often he had succeeded. The same colors in the twilight, though it lasted seven hours. A sky with a Milky Way, without a moon. Gravity that made him always just a little tired. Forests and mountains and sea, beauty and peace. And Sol, a pinpoint two thousand light-years off, with no chance of ever getting back.

A living hell.

He lit his pipe, filled with a native weed he'd gotten used to. There was no savor in a pipeful now, with bitterness eating at him. How could he spend his last night? There was only one way. The same as any other of the thousand nights before.

When he died, the last of his race would disappear from the face of Asmarad, sixth planet of the sun Ophiuchus. He was of Earth. Oh, Mother of Comforts, Earth, in the New Galactic Age! It was a long way from the barbarian Old Atomic, almost at the fringe of prehistory. As always, when he remembered his heritage from the distant home that had given him birth, his great bowed shoulders straightened and some of the old fire came back into his eyes.

Though he did not often allow himself to think of the past, his thoughts went back—how many years ago, Earth time?—to the day of triumph, when Brey's ship had put down a mile away by the shore of a salt sea. A thousand men and women with the purpose of carving out from untrodden paths the beginnings of a mighty civilization. To make a little Earth of Asmarad as had been done on a thousand other worlds across the galaxy—and perhaps by now, beyond.

A thousand other worlds—and here they had failed. No, they had not quite failed. Not yet. Not with Brey alive. Not tonight. Tomorrow.

Suddenly restless, he rose painfully and walked down the gravel path to his flower garden. He gazed at the brilliant multicolored web-things native to the region, but the sight for once gave him no pleasure. The restlessness grew stronger. It became an urgency, at once compelling and disturbing. Urgency to do something before he died. Something as important as drawing his next breath. Yet what could possibly be important to Hrlec Brey, landbound Senior Captain of the Space Fleet, the only Earthman left on Asmarad, on the evening of his death?

He looked from the flower garden across the plowed fields of his farm and then beyond, into the broad valley that ended against the blue haze of mountains a hundred miles away. For years

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the shimmering blue haze had symbolized the impassable wall between him and Earth. He was hemmed in, without machinery to transport himsef, without weapons except for a bow and arrow he had made himself.

He heard, far away, two *trocoids* thrashing aimlessly among the trees, their shrill staccato a lonely yet comforting sound. The animals, too, were almost like Earth animals. They reproduced by fission, like some of the lower forms of life on Earth. The *trocoid* was like an oversized wasp. The murderous *ithycyphos* was like a razorback horse, with a cry like a woman under torture. The meat-rich *ayala* made him think of landbound seals. There were other animals, too, other birds, and fish in the nearby sea.

Still the urgency beat at him and, without quite knowing why, he began to walk across the plowed field to the enclosure where he kept a few *ayalá* to fatten. My animals might be gone, he thought anxiously, my supply of meat might fail. *Hurry!* his mind told him. *Hurry, hurry!* His steps quickened.

NOW the long twilight deepened and night drifted slowly in from the far blue haze. Always when the slow night of Asmarad began to fall, Brey felt anew the soul-wrenching loneliness. This was a twilight made for the old pleasures that over the centuries had never changed. For gathering by the campfire and singing the old songs, for the spice of well-cooked meat, for whispers in the dark and strolls through the forest, for a woman's lips on yours. And back on Earth, under the shadows of the spaceships ready to hurtle the light-years across the galaxy, there was laughter on the lips of man, and their hearts held room for love.

With aching heart he remembered Ansa. A wisp of a girl she had been, and the first of the women to die—only a month after their landing. How long would they have been married now, had she lived? In this timeless world, it was his one regret that he could never know exactly. He could never celebrate their would-have-been anniversary. The day was different in length, as were the years. And he had no watch to keep track of the hours. He could never count the years she had been gone. But he knew they were many. Oh, how well he knew!

He began to walk faster, and then he began to trot, and then he broke into an urgent, lumbering run, stumbling across the even furrows of the potato-like *terna* he had planted.

And then an internal grinding shock of terrible power slammed him to the ground.

He was not knocked unconscious, but lay on his face on the rich red dirt, his mind shocked into stupor. At length he shook his head, pushed heavily up with his hands and climbed to shaky feet. He leaned against the logs of the enclosure, gathering strength. The pains were stronger now, the periodic nameless writhings inside him. Terror touched his mind, not at the pains themselves but at their pattern, over the months. Pain that was not quite pain, sensations without an Earth name. They had bothered him now and then, though lately they had come more often. And this was the most terrible of all.

What's been happening inside me all this time? Must be a disease. A native disease. And no doctors, no medicine left, no hospital. And no pretty nurse to hold my hand!

It's beginning, he thought. Death.

He had seen much of death since coming to Asmarad. Too much. First he had seen the babies born dead, the babies conceived on the way. No woman ever became pregnant on Asmarad. Nobody ever knew why. And then he had seen all the women die. Sudden deaths, painless and unexplained. The doctors could only suggest that the female physiology, complex and delicate as it was, could not adapt even to the slight changes on

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Asmarad. But the doctors never really knew.

Their purpose on Asmarad defeated, the men planned to return to Earth. And then Brey had seen the atomic explosion that had wrecked the ship and the entire community, killing them all. All but Brey.

And no ship was due from Earth for a hundred years.

My own death, Brey thought dully, wiping sweat from his face, will be different. Not silent and painless and mercifully quick.

He heard screaming in the distance and his blood chilled. The *ithycyphos* were near. Perhaps they would approach his farm. He would be ready if they did. Feeling stronger now, he walked to the gate to enter the enclosure.

The gate was open.

AT FIRST shock caught his breath, but upon examining the gate, he saw the latch had broken. He looked sharply into the enclosure for his six *ayala*. He counted only five. One had wandered off. No—there, far inside the enclosure, two intermediate-sized *ayala*, fissioned from the body of the other adult, were flopping about in the tall grass.

He grunted with satisfaction. If the others had wandered off, it would be days before he could find them, or catch others. He whistled and the five adults shambled over on nimble fins. He knew he must slaughter some of them. He picked the three fattest.

What instinct led me over here? How could I possibly have known my meat supply might be lost?

Followed by the docile *ayala*, he hurried back to his farmhouse, herded them inside and closed the door. His bow and arrow would be a match for the *ithycyphos*, but some instinct told him he needed even more protection. From the adjacent woodshed he got tools and lengths of stout planking and spent half an hour carefully barricading the windows. I've never done that in years. Why now, when I'm going to die?

Finished nailing crisscross planking to the two windows, he tested the barricade thoroughly for strength. Satisfied, he slaughtered the *ayala*, cut up their meat and packed it in the brine vat. (Enough for a month. But why did I slaughter them now? And why three? Why not more? Or less?

The screaming sounded again, still far across the valley. He knew he must lay in more food. He had meat now, but his stock of *terna* was low. There were five hours of twilight left, time enough to fill his bin.

He was busy for three hours digging *terna*, though three times more he was knocked flat by the terrible shocks, and the pains were with him all the time. His hands had begun to shake, and his eyes would blur and dim and he would have to rest a moment before he could see clearly again. He had begun to feel weaker. He knew the end was not far off.

As he worked, his mind wandered back again to his years with the Space Fleet, to the other planets he'd seen where Earthmen had been able to evolve. An old word, evolution, but in the New Galactic Age, a new meaning. On Earth it had taken a billion years for the human body to evolve into that of an intelligent biped. Now, on some of the more alien planets which imposed severe conditions on the preservation of human life, it took surprisingly less time to evolve in order to meet these conditions. An adaptability existed in the genes that had not been known before. Until it was discovered, colonization had been restricted to a handful of planets whose conditions were nearly identical to Earth's.

But the discovery of the faculty of adaptable evolution had opened a thousand worlds to Earthmen. It took centuries on some planets to evolve, slowly and painfully and with suitable protec-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tive measures, only decades on others. It made Brey proud. Proud that the human body was capable of so much. Proud that the inheritors of the galaxy were not the *lilithae* from the Ridge nor the degenerated mutations from the Hercules cluster, but Earthmen.

Like those Earthmen on Thor of Beta Centaurus whose lungs had evolved for breathing a methane atmosphere. Like those on Remus of Sirius whose lobster-like bodies had evolved to withstand temperatures which reached six hundred. Like those on Betelguese XXX, too far out from its sun for heat and light, whose eyes had atrophied over the generations and now were removed like appendices used to be removed on Earth, and whose perceptions had evolved to meet the new conditions. Or on Jpidr of the sun Deneb Algedi, where Earthmen's digestive systems had evolved to eating the metallic lichens adhering to rocks, the only native form of life. There were a billion Earthmen now on barren Jpidr.

And only one on Asmarad. . . .

WHY didn't we evolve before we died? But even if we could, it would have been too late. There were no women. Without a woman, his race must perish.

He finished putting up his supplies, and went back to the front porch to wait for the death that stalked him. He relit his pipe, his mind refreshed, the sense of urgency almost gone. But suddenly fires seared his body and he slumped back in his chair until the racking spasm passed.

Wings whirred past the porch and the screech of a *trocoid* beat at his ears. He watched the furry creature land at the base of a tree in front of his farmhouse. It waddled awkwardly toward a hole Brey had not noticed before, dragging in its creepers a length of floccose weed, its staple diet. The bird must have been boring out the hole the past several days. As Brey watched, the bird began to close the hole in the tree from inside, with chunks of bark and dirt and moss, cemented with secretion.

Now it was black night at last and the *trocoid* was for the moment silent inside its tree and Brey felt the wall of silence pressing in upon him.

Ansa, he thought dimly. *If only we had died together . . .*

New shocks erupted inside his body and a scream tore from his throat. A new urgency made him scramble inside the farmhouse where he just had time to close the door and slip planks into stays made for that purpose before he fell writhing to the floor.

There came a moment of peace between the shocks. *I was thinking of Ansa when it struck. Ansa? My wife. Funny, I can't seem to think. Must be in a daze. I remember Ansa, all right. What was Ansa, anyhow? I know. A woman. They look like Earthmen. Bipeds. I think they have intellects. Must be non-human. Like the lilithae.*

From the tree outside he heard the trocoid's muffled screeches. He knew it was the standard routine of the asexual bird for fissioning—when an old *trocoid's* instinct told it that it was about to die, it found a breeding place safe from the *ithycyphos,* supplied it with food, barricaded itself inside, and then fissioned into two nearly-grown, mindless trocoids. The food and the protection afforded by their parent would keep the *trocoids* alive till instinct took hold and they could break free into the world outside.

Brey forgot about the *trocoid* as his neck suddenly snapped and it became impossible to breathe, and he felt his body being rent asunder, as if something were trying to tear its way out of him.

And before he died, he had one bitter, final thought: *I deserve to die. On Asmarad, we never evolved.*

And after he died, the two naked humanoid creatures sprang to their feet to stare mindlessly at one another.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now men stand off beyond range — and blast us dead. . . ."

The Politician

By R. J. McGREGOR

Even a vegetable can manage a coup d'état on Mars

THE DEPOSED Majority Leader, Scarf, was tired and aching and angry. His shame was too great to bear alone. He had no plan now, except to reach that evil desert philosopher, Winx, the Cactus, and tell him a thing or two. Winx was responsible for all this. . . .

Scarf huddled his leaves around his thought-pod and he scampered, leaped, galloped over moss and rocks, his roots fairly flying, spiderwise. Each movement opened up his raw burn-wound a little more. He knew he was leaking sap.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Far away, he could feel the shrill wind tumbling closer, roiling down the dry canals, howling through the wrinkled plains of Gorth. So he must keep going, as he had most of last night since his failure, and all day, and now. He must outrace the wind, else it force him to anchor in the soil before he reach the cactus. The wind might even blow him back from whence he'd come.

Then the twin moons, Deimos and Phobos, sprang into the red and dusty sky, higher and higher. Bright night now. And finally there was the cactus, arms folded, so smug there alone. So self-sufficient. The sight made him rage, but eased his loneliness.

"You got me into this," he greeted, wasting no formalities. "That's the trouble with you philosophers. Always starting things you can't finish!" Gratefully he halted his long journey.

"Something went wrong?" asked the cactus calmly.

"You know very well what went wrong. You've got antenna."

I missed a lot of details," said Winx. "After all, I'm a stationary. And the new Queen's broadcast was garbled." He chuckled. "You made quite a commotion, anyway."

"But it didn't work! They caught me. Those infernal master-race plastiform Flochards caught me. And they burned me, Winx. I didn't even get to touch the Queen. One of Her Majesty's guards came up behind me with that electrode stem of his and he *burned off my tap root!*" Scarf beat the ground with a lower branch. He leaped on his springy roots and bounced around the cactus. "My tap root, do you understand? The seat of *honor* in my species." He subsided, moaning, "I'm ruined."

"You're broadcasting," said Winx. "If her Majesty happens to have her leaves tuned to you now, trying to—"

"I'm branded," cried Scarf. "An outcast. Who cares about me now?"

"But you're implicating me! I'm a sitting cactus. If her guards come here—"

"That's right. Worry about your own skin. You've got those mobile octopoid arms with poisoned spines. You could shoot a thousand of them dead before they got you. But me—"

"Have a drink on me," said Winx. "And stop your blubbering."

"I," said Scarf, "think I will."

He slipped a needle-like root into the cactus' base and started sipping. The sap of Winx was indeed soothing. Warm and half-fermented. This had been the original basis of their friendship, and it wasted nothing, for Winx had an over-active gland or two.

After a time he withdrew his root tendrils and sought a likely stone and probed in microscopically to take a few molecules of water-chaser. He pursed his pollen pod and sighed, "That's better."

LET' S back-track," said the cactus. "At the last session of Mars-Congress down in Sliweel last week the Flochards took over in a smooth coup. No more Republic. And the True-Sap-Bud-Mother of the Flochard species; that very moral lady, Bleeka—the outspoken ex-minority Leader of the late Congress—has set up a monarchy and declared herself Queen of All Mars. That's bitter, but it's history."

"Outbreeding us Atchellards secretly that way," grumbled Scarf. "Against all ethics. Hasn't been done for a million years. Taking over by force with her shock-troops like that. Cross-breeding up an unreported army of secret-weapons that way. Electric stalks—indeed!"

"I'm thinking," said Winx. "An idea will come."

"While you're thinking, think big. Think of the good of all Mars. We Atchellards are every bit as worthy as Flochards. Both species are related enough to interbreed. And just because of a freak of nature—just because Flochards happen to be able to more readily read the minds of those dirty Men-animals that have come poking around lately

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with their fire-ships, blasting us right and left—is no excuse."

"Then you still agree with Queen Bleeka," said Winx, "that Man has got to go."

"Except for the time-element. My policy of Peace-In-Our-Time was popular enough until she started screaming Mars-For-The-Martians and Peace-At-Any-Price doubletalk. Today she defined Peace as Mars-Without-Men. She's going to get us all killed, what with her shock-troops going around at night giving Men-miners the electric goose-treatment. She thinks that's funny. Thinks that'll scare them off the planet. I warned her a dozen times. Up till this week Men didn't even suspect us Vegetables. Thought he had no enemies on Mars. But now—"

"Already they're wise to us cactus," agreed Winx. "Just because a couple of soreheads in my family took a few needle pot-shots at Men, now Men stand off beyond range and blast us dead for pleasure."

"That's what I mean. Her Majesty says our million years of highly-develloped culture on Mars without artifacts has got to end now, or we die. She's short-sighted. Radical. Left-branch as they come. Yesterday she started advocating going underground. Building big secret weapons. Trying to blast men off. But the system's lousy with men. The minute we Vegetables come out with open war they'll swarm us."

"Us Cactus wouldn't have a chance—"

"Oh, stop thinking of yourself. Think of Mars." Scarf folded his leaves over his thought-bulb and shuddered and shrank it down inside his lower stalks.

A THOUGHTFUL, bi-partisan silence set in. Winx' thought waves were ponderous but scattered and schizoid.

"Do you still like my original idea," said Winx, "of simply infiltrating Mens' mines and camps. Worrying them with spores and spines and nettles and poisons and pollens till they can't stay around?"

"What do you think I've been trying to sell to the Congress, until Her Majesty—" Scarf's mind choked on the title. *"Her Majesty!* I warned the delegates never to start letting females into government. First one. Then ten. Then a hundred. Now look. A ridiculous, impractical monarchy. And *her*, of all Flochards. She may be the True-Sap-Flochard-Bud-Mother this generation, but she's sure short on brains. I've known her from a seedling. Gets lost in her own alleged thinking. And just because she's trained her telepathy voice to be heard all over Mars doesn't mean she's got anything to *say*. All she uses her pods and flowers for is to go around acting sexy. Always trying to goad the Flochard males into competing for her True-Line troth. Neurotic. You should have seen her last week. She's not so much—"

"Yet," mused Winx, "any whim of hers is law. And without her fanatical female leadership the Flochards would have listened to reason. I told you how to stop her. Catch her relaxed and asleep, I said. Levitate and drop on her. Puncture her pod and she's dead, I said. That *simple*. That *beautifully* simple. And you had to get caught."

"I lost my head there at the last moment. Once she and I were quite good friends. And last night when I was there—so close—I realized I couldn't stab her like that, even for the good of Mars. I thought I'd just try to kidnap her."

"And her with the loudest voice on Mars!"

"Well," said Scarf, "any normal Vegetable might have lost his nerve. She's not very bright, but she sure is beautiful."

"Kidnap her, eh?" scoffed Winx. "With all her electrode guards hanging around."

"I thought I'd carry her away on the wings of the wind and make her see reason. I'm not without charm, you

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know, Winx." Scarf beamed a blistering tickle at the cactus. "Go on," he cried. "I know you. Needle me. Say I'm a coward. You'll get around to it sooner or later."

"Not yet. I've thought of a plan that will test your courage even more."

"Then I think I'll have another drink."

"Go ahead." Winx allowed himself a secret inner-glow. For with Scarf addicted to his sap this way, Scarf could be very useful indeed, for many years to come, if he could just put this over. There was still a good chance for a Cactus-dominated Mars government. . . .

He collected his thoughts, packaging them for Scarf's particular weaknesses, omitting certain phases:

"Keep drinking," he said. "You'll need it tonight. Before this storm strikes. Because you'll need the wind to travel. And you may have to travel far and fast, even to the Polar Cap. You'll be hated, but you'll make history—"

Scarf quivered his leaves. He didn't like the tone of this. He kept drinking. Leafy remains of dead relatives whisked past. Dust began choking his pores. He shook it off.

"It's ingenious. It can't miss," mused Winx. "It'll make the Flochards a laughing-stock."

"And probably get me killed."

"An Atchellard of your caliber," said Winx, boring in, "never shrinks from mere danger. You say you're a true patriot of the planet. You say your sap bleeds for Mars. You say your race is as worthy as the Flochard's and you want a solution to all this—ignoring, as usual, the truth that we cactus are superior and should rule—then listen to me, my friend:"

"Softly," said Scarf, still drinking. "Even the Mosses have ears."

The two plotters huddled for a time. The boldness of the scheme, in abstract, appealed to Scarf. But the necessary daring of it frightened him. He drank to enlarge his courage to the task, but still not convinced.

"I'd rather do it tomorrow," he said.

"Tomorrow may be too late."

"But I've travelled far. I'm tired."

A small armored toad crawled into the lea of a nearby rock and sent out a few fuzzy thoughts and went to sleep, dreaming of ancestral waters.

"We'll let that toad decide," said Winx. "If he jumps right, you go tomorrow. If he jumps left, you go tonight."

"And if he doesn't jump, I don't go at all."

"Splendid," cried Winx. He took careful aim with his longest arm. "Ho, toad!" he called. "Jump!" Then he fired a needle-spine neatly between two tiny armor plates.

Naturally the toad gave a great leap to left and died, poisoned.

"Tonight," announced the cactus.

"That wasn't fair. You shot him in the left hind leg and paralyzed it so that his right naturally pushed—"

"A bargain's a bargain," said the cactus sententiously. . . .

And when Scarf had gone to do the evil deed, Winx said to himself in wonder: *How sad that such a mind as mine is rooted to one place. I have changed history. Destroyed two races. What a pity that there'll be no one to know and admire my statesmanship.* He folded his arms and fell asleep, for he hated to be caught awake in a wind.

He dreamed that he, Wisest of All Cactus, ruled Mars. *Great Winx.* The Merciless, they all called him. . . .

SCARF WAS riding high on the ferment of his cactus-friend, and on the wind. By simple levitation he kept his altitude some eighty feet off the terrain, while the forefront of the storm's great push drove him in minutes a whole day's surface-scrambling. And the wind was so dependable in direction, if not velocity.

How clever of him, he thought, to have thought of this alone. He'd had this in mind often enough, and that stupid cactus had only punctuated his

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

own design. He spread his leaves out flat and he fanned his roots into a plane surface.

This storm, he thought, when it struck full-force, would be impetus enough to loft him to the Far Side of Mars—which would probably be very necessary.

Ahead, there, were the red granite pinnacles. He lifted and caught a firmer gust and swept over. And down in a swirling draft. Down into the protected dry lake of Lystum where the new Military Parliament of Flochards encompassed their new Queen. Useless thing, anyway; a Queen. A silly revival after Monarchy had died a million years ago.

They wouldn't welcome him, of course. But even Flochards had their ethics. Such a moral creature—Her Majesty. Such clear, pure enunciation of her alleged "thoughts." He was thankful she was sleeping and not broadcasting her "Royal Wisdom" all over the place. If only she'd stayed out of politics, he thought, she wouldn't have been half bad. Oh well—already he was thinking of Her Royal Majesty in the past tense.

He came lower like thistle-down. No sneaking this time. He settled to the ground and unfurled his fanned roots and scampered toward the encampment.

Then a fool electric guard recognized his mind and shrilled the alarm.

"Urgent information for Her Majesty," he told the dullard. "I come as a friend."

"But she's sleeping—" the guard objected.

He argued cleverly with the fellow and gained audience.

EXTRAORDINARY!" said the Queen, in those bell-like tones. "I never thought you'd venture here again after last night. Well—?"

As usual, her thought-bulb went palpitating and pulsating into the ultra-clinic range and she stood on the tips of her Regal roots, almost twice as tall as he, but that was expected.

A brilliant thing, she was, with rainbow markings. And not without appeal. Those petals of hers! Deliberately, brazenly open that way. And the way she swayed and rustled. . . .

"Well—?" she said again. In her tone was something less than animosity. More than pity for his late disgrace.

He almost felt sorry for her.

He gave a sudden spring and then with a great, sensual plunge he burst his pollen-pod and dusted all her flowers.

All without a word.

Neat.

Now he was levitating. Going up fast and away.

And she—still voiceless with shock. In a moment would come her jumble of rage, screaming around the planet. ("Guards!" she would shrill any second now. "After him. Burn him. Your Queen has been raped!")

Any instant now, he thought, they'd come. They'd boil up after him and ride the storm, encircling Mars thrice, if need be, to get him. But he had his headstart.

He shouted to all Mars: *"For Freedom and the Atchellards! Down with Monarchy!"*

Ho, he thought, soaring. The vaunted Bud-Mother of the million-year-old-true-sap-line of the self-acclaimed-master-race Flochards.

Ho—Ho! And he had inserted a new splinter-party. With a new, natural middle-of-the-road party policy. The new Queen's own children, and she without a mate! He wished the stupid cactus were awake to hear this now—

He listened for thoughts of pursuit. Oddly, there were none yet. Strange. He lowered and anchored to a crumbly rock. She was not ordering his death-chase.

But the voice was unmistakable. Her voice. Yet not shrilling round-the-planet in that hideous regal key.

Incredible!

"Come back," she was calling, "Come back, Your Majesty. Come back. . . ."

Why, even the cactus philosopher hadn't thought of this angle.

Scarf was King! ● ● ●

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARBITER

Out in space, out in the silence

and the darkness between worlds,

where the hours drag so slowly,

there's always time for murder!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a novelet by SAM MERWIN, JR.

IVAN RUTHERFORD Y BARRA, Permanent Secretary of the United Planets, watched the thin trail of fire in the star-sprinkled night sky and felt stirrings of familiar panic. Although he had greeted incoming representatives of the inner and outer planets some three hundred-odd times during his six-year tenure as Permanent Secretary—although the curved window through which he watched was a two-foot-thick panel of plexiquartz—although he knew the descending space-ship was chained to its landing beam more securely than Prometheus to his mythical rock—yet panic persisted.

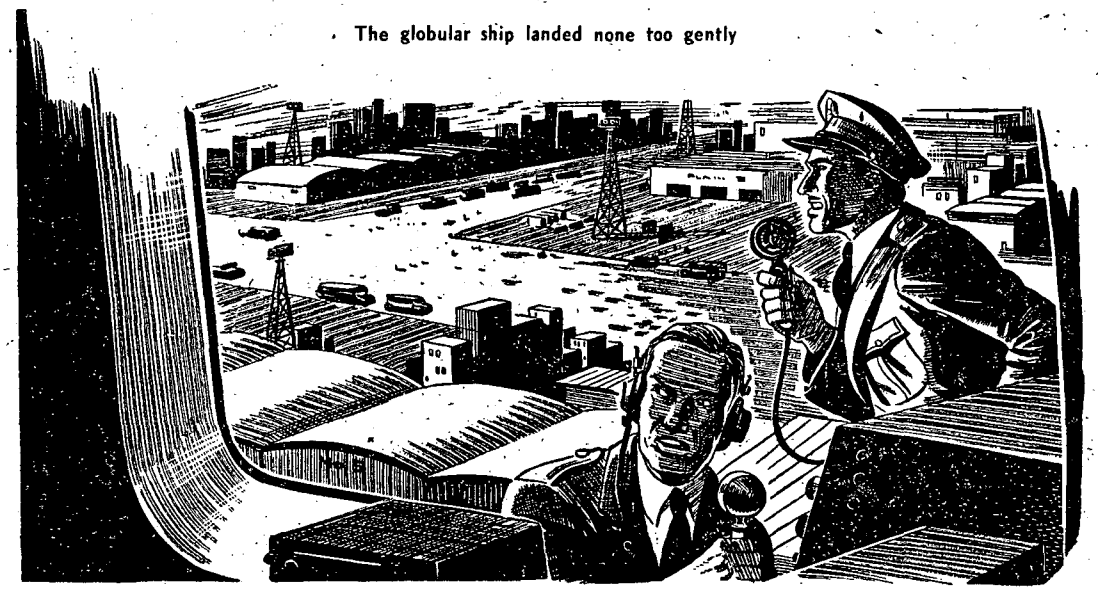
It seemed to Rutherford, as it seemed to everyone else in the reception building at Lackawanna Spaceport, as if the great ship from Venus were headed directly for himself, must inevitably squash him like an ant under a size-twelve boot. It was not a nice feeling.

He looked for reassurance, across the vast girth of the spaceport, at the flood-lit faery-towers of Newark, rising like some odd subterranean extrusion from the flat Jersey meadow. Behind him lay the long rampart of the palisades, behind the palisades the even more incredible faery-towers of Manhattan.

It would be nice, Rutherford thought, if the intricate negotiations that lay ahead of him could be managed as simply and safely as would be the landing of the Venerian ship. He took his big Oom Paul from his lips, said to Mahmoud Singh, his personal secretary, who stood at his elbow, "Sometimes I wish protocol didn't demand our presence here every time a Grade-One space-visitor comes in. When I think of the time consumed. . . ."

"Unfortunately it's part of your job, sir," said Mahmoud Singh softly. Like Rutherford he spoke the interplanetary *Lingua Franca*—a blend of English, Spanish, Russian, German, Hindu and

The globular ship landed none too gently



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chinese, with more recent elements of Venerian, Martian and Ganymedean.

Rutherford studied him through a cloud of pipe-smoke, wishing not for the first time that Mahmoud were not quite so literal-minded. His secretary was an attractive young man, wearing his dusky Hindu head atop the broad-shouldered graceful warrior's body inherited from Turkish and Circassian forebears on his mother's side.

He wondered what might happen if Mahmoud's passionate heritage should break through the rigid shell of deportment that encased it—stopped wondering as the uniformed space-aide at his other elbow said, "*Oh*-oh! She's still in a spin. Look out below!"

Rutherford felt a sick weakness invade his body. The *Astarte*, growing ever larger, was spinning slowly, inexorably, as it descended toward Earth. The inner core was gyroscopically stable, ensuring crew and passengers against disaster—but with the outer hull still in spin, the final braking blast might flicker death in any direction. He ground his teeth hard into the stem of his heavy Boer pipe.

After more than three decades of uneventful landings at Lackawanna, there had been two like disasters in the past four months. In the first the braking blast had hurled its lethal brilliance to the southeast—and the southernmost tip of Jersey City had been sheared off as by some cosmic spatula. The second, five weeks earlier, had sliced off the tallest of Hoboken's towers, spreading a rain of molten death for a radius of half a mile.

This time a sudden plume of pure-white flame — almost blinding even through the polarized plexiquartz—flared out directly toward Newark. For a brief endless instant the faery-towers glowed golden—and then, like gold in a smelter, began to soften, to dissolve. The flame flickered out as the globular ship came none-too-gently to rest on the landing area—yet its afterglow persisted and brightened ruddily as molten steel and stone were transmuted into flame.

"That tears it," said the uniformed space-aide tersely. "They'll never stand for three in a row."

Rutherford took the bitten-off stem of his pipe from between his lips, picked up the pipe itself from the plastoleum floor. He turned to Mahmoud, whose dark complexion had turned grey, said, "Mahmoud, observe relief measures taken—and give me a report in the morning. Commodore Willis"—this to the uniformed space-aide—"please attend me through the ceremony."

UNDER the circumstances the reception was perfunctory—minus the usual flourishes the occasion demanded. The horridly beautiful spectacle of Newark ablaze forbade more than a shell of formality. Juan Kurtz, the stocky pasty-faced Venerian plenipotentiary, seemed stubbornly set upon absolving his planet of all guilt.

He said, for the benefit of the vidar-cameras, "Please tell the folk of Mother Earth that I speak for all Venus when I say that we shall give freely from our hearts to those who have suffered loss through this ghastly accident." He went on in his chill precise way, uttering sympathy that seemed more mental than emotional.

Rutherford's attention, however, was focussed more intently upon grizzled weed-thin Erasmus Chen-Smith, United Planets Ambassador-at-Large, who had also come in on the *Astarte*. Chen-Smith looked definitely unwell. Yellow of countenance, he leaned heavily on the shoulder of an attendant.

"Sorry, Ivan," he croaked. "Picked up a fine case of Venus carrot-poisoning. See you tomorrow—three o'clock." Then his eyes closed, his head fell forward. Had not Commodore Willis leapt in to give a hand he would have collapsed on the plastoleum floor.

Riding back to Manhattan alongside Kurtz in a United Planets helicar, Rutherford had a defeatist feeling that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the current problems confronting United Planets and himself were insurmountable. The disaster at Lackawanna Spaceport might prove the proverbial last straw.

"How serious do you expect the repercussions to be, Excellency?" the Venerian Plenipotentiary inquired. Like Rutherford's, his eyes were on the vidar-screen, which displayed in full-colored horror the Newark holocaust. Like Rutherford's, his real thoughts were elsewhere, his vista far more universal.

"Very serious, Honorable," Rutherford replied. "My guess is that Earth Government will suspend operations in all spaceports within danger-radius of any community pending further safeguards."

"Impossible?" Kurtz exploded, his usual taut diplomatic poise shattered. "It will mean disruption of all interplanetary trade."

"Is trade so important," Rutherford asked, "when it means destruction of life?" He looked ruefully at his broken pipe, needing a smoke to restore his own emotional balance.

Kurtz snorted, then said, "If the men and women who risk constant death in the Great Desert of Venus raising collacactus for snug Earthfolk ever heard such sentiments from you—"

"I am fully aware of how they would feel," Rutherford told him firmly. "Yet they risk their lives deliberately, seeking assured profit. What profit is there for those who died tonight in Newark—or earlier in Hoboken and Jersey City?"

The envoy made a deprecatory gesture, said, "But these accidents—the first in thirty years—it's several thousand to one against there being another, ever."

Rutherford said, "There need not have been these—if your people had stuck to the Schupps Drive instead of installing Kennelleys."

This time Kurtz gesture was impatient. He said, "And lose a week at parahelion in transit? My people would never accept that. Competition with lighter-gravitied Mars and Ganymede is far too tight to cut payloads for more fuel *and* risk having our rivals beat us."

The two officials rode the rest of the way in silence.

IN THE study of his twelve-room suite at the New Waldorf, Rutherford replaced the broken stem of the Oom Paul with another kept for emergencies in a drawer of his black-walnut smoking cabinet. Then he said, "Jacques, this is the first pipe-stem I've bitten through since I was awaiting confirmation of my appointment to this post."

Commodore Willis joggled ice-globes in his glass of Martian lichenwasser. He was a tall well-cut specimen whose unexpectedly alert and disciplined intelligence twinkled beneath the ineradi-

For Auld Lang Syne

EVER since Sam Merwin left these hallowed halls for the rocky career of a free-lance writer we have been deluged with letters asking why we don't buy some stories from him. Fans still remember his HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS with approval, and many a list of best science fiction novels carries it near the top.

We didn't see any Merwin stories for awhile because Sam had other commitments; but loyalty to his alma mater assured us of first shot at anything he did when he did it. The commitments now out of the way, science fiction stories by Merwin are in the works. And now "ye olde tormentor," who always gave as good as he got, is up on the block—go easy pals, for auld lang syne.

—*The Editor*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cable bronze of deep space. He said, "Want me to stand by, sir?"

"If you wish," said Rutherford. "But it's unlikely we'll get a full disaster report before morning. I'm going out for a bit."

Minutes later he departed, smiling inwardly at the suspicion he read on his space-aide's handsome countenance. Possessed of a sound and, to the more serious souls about him, at times disrupting sense of humor, Rutherford knew very well what the younger man was thinking. It would inevitably concern himself and—women.

Chuckling openly he slipped out the private entrance at sidewalk level beneath his tower apartment, casually acknowledged the salutes of the two sentries in their slate-grey uniforms, hopped nimbly into a waiting vehicab. Sinking back onto its airmoss cushions he gave the address of a house in the Old City.

In the near-total rebuilding of New York that ran parallel with its development as Interplanetary capital, the city planners had wisely left a charming segment of the old city, extending from the Plaza north, along Central Park East to Ninety-sixth Street and east to Lexington Avenue, intact. Here were mixed in polyglot and charming disarray the Swedish moderne apartment houses of the mid-twentieth century, the white-stone-and-concrete structures of the 1920's, the marble mansions and granite palaces of earlier decades and the chocolate-colored brownstones that had preceded *them*.

It was to one of the last-named, a rather-shabby house in the mid-Seventies, that the vehicab took Rutherford. He paid off the driver and ascended a flight of sandstone steps to a heavy wooden double-door beside which an antique brass bell-pull gleamed softly in the dimness of old-fashioned street lights.

He pulled it twice—then three times—then waited. A red-faced jovial-looking man, his paunch italicized by the long out-of-date tattersall vest that covered it, opened the door and said, "You are late, *Brother Goodwin*. The meeting is already in progress."

"It was unavoidable, *Brother van Dyne*," said Rutherford. He went on inside, climbed a flight of steps to enter a long double-room that resembled a museum hall. Its walls were hung with every sort of lethal weapon, from crude flint axe-heads of the troglodytes, through arbelasts, poniards, pistols, pikes and hang-ropes, to modern ray-inducers. Around three sides of the chamber, in transparent cases, were miniature reenactments of famous crimes of fact and fiction, from Cain and Abel, through Aggie Borden, the Pit and the Pendulum, a tub-slaying by Dr. Crippen and others, to the twenty-first-century assassination of the Premier of Mars via death-ray.

AT THE open end stood a platform, complete with scholarly-looking lady speaker, who was addressing some two-score seated listeners on the trend away from the fictional detective puzzle toward sadistic violence during the second quarter of the last century. Rutherford nodded to a scattering of acquaintances as he slipped into a seat.

The Permanent Secretary of the United Planets was an incurable crime-mystery-story addict. Of all honors that had befallen him he prized most highly his membership in the Mystofans, a small association of like addicts who met bi-weekly in the Old City house to discuss the more arcane aspects of their hobby. Hypnotics and truth sera had rendered crime detective a mere matter of questioning for almost a century, had thereby eliminated not only most major felonies but the literature about them as well.

Half-listening to the speaker, who had just moved from Raymond Chandler to Mickey Spillane, Rutherford considered how complete was the democracy of the Mystofans, who hid their outside names and stations beneath the alias of a favor-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ite author or character. Thus the tattersall-vested doorman, a disciple of Philo Vance, became *S. S. van Dyne* while Rutherford, who delighted in the indolent brilliance of Nero Wolf, was *Archy Goodwin*, the names of Wolf as well as of Rex Stout, his creator, having already been preempted.

About him Rutherford recognized *Sister Sayers*, otherwise a leading woman attorney, *Brother Lecoq*, a Fifth Avenue shoe-clerk, *Sister Allingham*, a vidar chanteuse, *Brother Holmes*, in real life a university dean. The members came from all walks and branches of society, united only by their hobby.

After the speech there was an open symposium, during which the discussion ranged from such primitives as Poe and Collins to the sophistications of Agatha Christie and the violences of Dashiell Hammett, with digressions on the techniques of thuggee and the mackerel-shine decadence of Matthew Head. Thereafter all moved downstairs for the traditional pilsener and smorgasbord and good general talk.

While Rutherford was washing down a piece of smoked salmon with pilsener, an exceedingly comely young lady approached him and introduced herself as *Sister Rhinehart*. She explained that she was a new member and had been given to understand *Brother Goodwin* was interested in purchasing original Rex Stout manuscripts. Large grey eyes, slightly tilted, gleamed with animal attractiveness as she added, "Of course mine isn't a Nero Wolf—it's about one of his lesser-known creations, a sheriff named Tecumseh Fox."

"Which one?" asked Rutherford, donning a mask of disinterest. If the girl only realized, a Tecumseh Fox original, by its very rarity, was far more valuable than a Nero Wolf. It was to mystery manuscript collectors like comparing a Button Gwynnett autograph to the greater but far commoner signature of George Washington.

"The title is *Bad for Business*," the girl told him and Rutherford sensed that if it were genuine he was on the trail of a major find. Asked how she came to own it *Sister Rhinehart* explained that her maternal grandfather, an antique fancier, had picked it up among the contents of an old attic somewhere in Connecticut. "I hate to part with it," she concluded gravely, "but I'm a Mary Roberts Rhinehart fan myself and I do need some extra money just now. If I hadn't happened to be in town for this meeting the idea of selling it would never have occurred to me."

She added that she could have the script ported in from her Maryland home by noon on the morrow, would bring it to him after lunch. Rutherford, excited at the prospect of such a purchase, offered his name and address but the girl smiled, said she knew who he was and that her name was Turina Vascelles.

RUEFULLY she added, "I've got to get back to the restoration of my family's estate. It's an endless job. Builders today no longer seem to care about doing the sort of work they did so lovingly back in the nineteen fifties. And the expenses! You can understand why selling this manuscript should prove a real windfall."

"Of course, my dear," said Rutherford benignly. The lift he got from the encounter stayed with him all the way back to his suite and, later, through the three-hour vigil he and Commodore Willis maintained, listening to reports of the Lackawanna disaster, which grew worse every few minutes. When at last he turned in, having received word the fire had been checked, the known deaths had passed two thousand and appeared to be but a fraction of the total expected.

"Our Venerian friends," he told the commodore over a nightcap of lichenwasser, "have got to be curbed. If they don't replace their Kennelleys with Schupps Drives they may find themselves boycotted."

"They'll never do it," said the space-aide somberly. "They can't see them-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

selves cutting profits for the sake of a few lives. They may try to boycott Earth if you seek to enforce the rules."

Rutherford sighed and said, "Don't remind me, Jacques. But popular opinion will cut the ground out from under me if I don't try." He shrugged, added, "Perhaps science will come up with an answer—or perhaps poor Chen-Smith has a solution tucked away in that big brain of his. It's a damned shame he had to come down with carrot-poison just now."

"Rotten breaks all around," said the commodore, who was beginning to show the effects of the lichenwasser. He hiccuped, apologized, rose unsteadily and bade Rutherford good-night.

The Permanent Secretary shed all official worries as he slid into bed. This ability, plus his sense of humor, enabled him to endure the ceaseless tensions of his job without cracking. It was commonly accepted amongst the well-informed that, without his tact and human talents, the United Planets would long since have fallen into jarring disunion. But now some insiders were saying openly that the job might be growing too much even for him.

He came to grips with it at ten the following morning, when he sat with delegations from Mars and Ganymede at a long table in the East River Secretariat. The visitors had come to protest the original Planet Exploitation Agreement of 2016, which put the moons of Jupiter under Martian dominion and those of Saturn under a Venerian mandate. At that time, since Man had barely explored, much less exploited, the satellites of the two heavy planets, the division was academic.

NOW, in 2073, it was topical and red-hot. The Jovian moons had long since been settled and their colonists, in alliance with Mars, insisted the treaty be altered to free the moons of Saturn from Venus. They based their claim on proximity, colonial experience and the fact that Venus was not yet ready to take advantage of its mandate.

Aloha Svensen, the dark-skinned silver-blond Chief Delegate from Ganymede, stressed their claim in slow controlled accents that barely revealed the fires raging beneath. "If the treaty is not soon altered, our administration will be unable to prevent settlers from colonizing Titan privately. And if the Venerians seek to remove them we shall have to support our people with force if necessary."

"Hear, hear!" said Martian Plenipotentiary Feruccio van Zandt.

"We must have *lebenstraum* to follow our natural course of expansion," the comely Aloha concluded. "We will get it—by peaceful means *if possible*. But we shall get it, never fear."

"Let's look at the record," said Rutherford. He quoted from a paper Mahmoud Singh slipped deftly in front of him. "Mars, according to the most recent census, has a population of two hundred forty-six million, Ganymede five and a half, the other satellites a total of less than two. Yet Earth is self-sufficient with a population exceeding six billions. Do I hear rightly when you talk of *lebenstraum?*"

This evoked a storm of protest. Earth the delegates insisted, was a rich planet on which life was easy. It was nothing like hacking our existence on globes never meant for human habitation. Hardship had bred pioneers of tougher cast than the billions at home, men and women who could not be curbed by laws to them unreasonable. And so on.

At noon Rutherford presided over the luncheon of official greeting for the Venerian legates, whose arrival the night before had caused the Newark holocaust. Nor was the tone lightened by recent news that Earth Government had suspended operation of all spaceports within twenty miles of human habitation, pending development of new safety measures. This left open but a handful of emergency fields in such unlikely commercial locations at the Andes, the Rockies, the Gobi and Sahara Deserts.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Juan Kurtz fumed between courses and speeches, once muttered to Rutherford, "I can't guess the consequences of this ill-considered act, Excellency—but I fear they may be serious."

"I think we may work something out," replied the Permanent Secretary with optimism he was far from feeling. He was glad to get back to his hotel suite for a brief respite following the luncheon. He even toyed briefly with the idea of resigning and hibernating in the microfilm library of the Mystofan Club.

He had almost forgotten Turina Vascelles and her manuscript when, shortly before three o'clock, Mahmoud announced the girl's arrival and ushered her into his study. She was beguiling in a brief three-piece boulevard suit, carried a plastocase under one slim arm.

"I do hope you'll find it what you want," she told him, opening the case on his desk and withdrawing a thick manuscript of yellowed typewriter bond. She handed him a transparent envelope, added, "And here are the authentications."

INTERPLANETARY problems faded from Rutherford's consciousness—as he studied first the authentications, then the manuscript itself, his interest and excitement mounted. Pending comparison tests with other Wolf manuscripts, typewriter and fingerprint and radioactive tracer tests, he could not definitely name it a genuine Rex Stout. But it looked genuine, it felt genuine, it had the authentic *aura*. When at last he had completed his examination he told the girl as much, asked if she'd mind leaving it in his hands while further tests were made.

"Of course not, *Brother Goodwin*," she said, rising from the chair in which she had been quietly sitting and smoking an everbac cigarette. "My address is on the authentication papers." She departed gracefully and Rutherford, staring wistfully after her and wishing himself two decades younger, was roused from his reverie by Mahmoud, who entered to inform him that Erasmus Chen-Smith was waiting in the small drawing room.

Rutherford looked at his watch, opened his mouth to upbraid his secretary for not informing him sooner, recalled having left strict orders not to be disturbed, said nothing. It was close upon four o'clock, which meant he must have kept the Ambassador-at-Large waiting almost an hour. He bustled into the small drawing room, apologies ready on his tongue.

Erasmus Chen-Smith lay on his back, sprawled out on the carpet. His mouth was open, his skin even yellower than it had been the night before. He was as dead as a man can be.

Rutherford's first thought was self-recriminatory—it was he who had sent his colleague on the mission that had caused his death. His second was to summon help.

The Medical Service experts, quickly upon the scene, were mildly puzzled. The young physician-in-charge told Rutherford, "Superficial fluoro-examination reveals sudden crystallization of the liver. You say he was suffering from Venerian carrot poison?" He shrugged, added, "It's odd—we've had no deaths from that disease in five years. Must have been some peculiarly personal susceptibility. But chystallization of the liver. . . Well, we'll have it pinned in a few hours or days. We'll keep you informed, Excellency."

"I'd appreciate it," said Rutherford. "The Ambassador was more than a colleague—he was an old and valued friend."

Mahmoud, close at hand, said piously, "A great misfortune—especially at this time."

Rutherford filled his pipe, thought it over and nodded. It might be more than a misfortune—it might be disaster, particularly if the late Chen-Smith, during the course of his informal investigations of conditions on Venus, had uncovered any vital facts at variance with official facts. If the Ambassador-at-Large had

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kept written or photographic records—but Rutherford shook his head and inhaled. So delicate were the times, so reliable the dead man's memory and character, he had decided not to risk putting anything on tape.

Mahmoud cleared his throat to bring Rutherford out of his abstraction, said, "I regret intruding at this moment but the Venerian delegation has been awaiting your presence in the large drawing room—since three-fifteen. They may resent. . . ."

They did resent. The Permanent Secretary found himself with a thoroughly disgruntled delegation on his hands. Rutherford apologized, explained briefly that Chen-Smith was dead. But Kurtz, the Venerian Plenipotentiary, said stiffly, "On behalf of my planet I can only express my deepest sympathies. However, the life or death of Ambassador-at-Large Chen-Smith is not the purpose of our visit."

He paused to look quickly at the Venerian Ambassador, Yamurai Corrigan, whose hair flamed redder than ever thanks to the unusual pallor of his face. Rutherford, applying all the Nero Wolf psychological acuteness he could muster, sought vainly to read the quick disturbed glance the two official visitors exchanged. Mere anger, in men so disciplined to the niceties of interplanetary diplomacy, could not account for their disturbed state.

KURTZ, acting as spokesman, looked almost in a state of collapse as he went on to say, "Our purpose is to make plain to Your Excellency that the announcement of the closing of the spaceports has been received with high disfavor at Venus City. My colleague"—with a nod toward Yamurai Corrigan—"and I have been instructed to inform the United Planets Secretariat that unless the suspension is revoked within one week, Earth-time, Venus will be forced to seek other channels for its commerce."

It was ultimatum, Rutherford realized, as the Venerians bowed their way out with stiffness unusual even for them. Coupled with the war-threat of the morning from the Martian and Jovian Satellite delegations, to say nothing of the tragic death of Chen-Smith, it represented for Rutherford the most desperate crisis either he or the United Planet Secretariat had ever faced.

He sank into an armchair, poured some lichenwasser from the carafe depleted by the Venerians during their wait. But it tasted silghtly bitter and he returned the tumbler to tabletop, barely sipped, said to the hovering Mahmoud, wondering if his metabolism were awry, "Dat's de trouble wid dis job. It's disfavor and dat favor and . . . ."

Mahmoud regarded him sadly and said, "Perhaps a brief rest, Excellency. It has been a most fatiguing night and day."

"Thanks — but not now," replied Rutherford, wondering what perversity had driven him to the infantile pun in front of his secretary. All at once he could not abide the sight of him. "Mahmoud, "he said, "I want you to prepare a précis on the new Martian-Satellite demands and the exact state of negotiations—oh, and on your way out tell Commodore Willis I want to see him in half an hour."

"Yes, sir," said Mahmoud, bowing respectfully. But his eyes were not respectful as he said from the door, "Excellency, perhaps I presume but I still think a brief rest would—"

"It would drive me balmier than you think I am now," he snapped rudely at the Hindo-Turk. Alone he walked to the window-wall and looked out at the lacy patterns of Manhattan, bathed in the lingerie hues of the sunset. But his mind was not on the incredible spectacle. He was considering patiently the chain of circumstances that had brought the United Planets and himself into their present predicament.

What Americans of a century ago had termed "the breaks" had been running against both the organization and him-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self with a recent persistence that was more than a little frightening. The squabble between Mars and Ganymede and Venus over the Saturnian satellites had long been foreseen, of course. Under ordinary circumstances, while a major interplanetary problem, it was one that should long since have been settled by reasonable concessions all around.

But circumstances of late had not been ordinary. The unprecedented series of spaceport accidents at Lackawanna had made the Venerians even testier than usual about their rights among the planets. Faced with the threat of commercial losses through enforced use of the comparatively light Schupps Drive in their heavier gravity, they had been in no mood to grant concessions to anyone. Which, in the illogical course of events, had put up the collective back of the Mars-Ganymede faction.

Then there were the more personal, more human, channel breakdowns of the past twenty-four hours. First, of course, was Chen-Smith's coming down with Venerian carrot-poison on the *Astarte*. No one else on the big ship, among crew or passengers, had been similarly affected. There had followed in quick order the third Lackawanna disaster, the two ultimata between which was sandwiched Chen-Smith's death.

Rutherford did some silent swearing. It was almost like a conspiracy. For instance, if Turina Vascelles had not buttonholed him last night with her Rex Stout manuscript, he would not have arranged to see her and kept Chen-Smith waiting. The Permanent Secretary cursed the evil day that had seen his induction into Mystofan membership.

Such thinking, he well knew, was not only idle, it was psychologically dangerous. He wondered if he were acquiring a persecution complex at this late date, went back to his barely-sipped glass of lichenwasser, sipped it again, stared at it. . . .

IT *DID* taste bitter—beyond any sharpness that might be given it by his own disturbed metabolism. He sat down, relit his pipe, waited until Commodore Willis entered, told him to help himself to a drink. The space-aide poured himself a tumblerful from the carafe, took a healthy swig, all but spat it out, regarded Rutherford reproachfully.

"Sorry, Jacque," said the latter. "I have to know. What does it taste like to you?"

"Like a dose of salts," Willis said angrily. "This isn't export lichenwasser, this is the genuine Martian article."

"I suspected as much," Rutherford told him drily. "Somebody seems to have made a mistake. The Venerian delegation was here this afternoon. They looked exceedingly uncomfortable."

"I should hope so!" Willis began to chuckle. Then he grew serious, added, "I heard about poor Chen-Smith. Another putrid break."

"A tragic one," Rutherford told him absently. His mind was suddenly operating on all jets. Lichenwasser from Mars, which had gradually become the favorite interplanetary drink, took two basic forms—disregarding various flavorings and degrees of intoxicating strength. The original, or "genuine Martian," had an exceedingly high mineral content whose effect upon humans unconditioned to the thin atmosphere of the red planet was that of epsom salts. It was even more effective upon Venerians than upon Earthmen. Not until this mineral content was processed out of the drink, as in the "export" variety, had it attained more than domestic popularity.

Someone, it seemed, had made the error of filling the carafe in the large drawing room with the native variety, usually reserved only for visitors from Mars. Or had it been an error? Rutherford got up, entered the small drawing room next door, put the carafe to his lips, tasted its contents—and made a face. It was the same.

"Something up?" inquired Commodore Willis, who had followed him curiously.

"It could be," said Rutherford, again sitting down and pulling on his pipe. "It

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just could be." He was probably being an utter damned fool, he thought, to suspect anything. But if his suspicions proved justified. . . It was too much for a Mystofan. Suppose the chain of misfortune *had* been induced; suppose he and United Planets *were* facing a conspiracy rather than a chain of misfortune at all.

He said, "Jacques, I'm probably out of my mind but here it is." And then he told his space-aide of his growing suspicions. The Commodore listened with growing excitement, asking occasional questions. But when Rutherford had finished he shook his handsome head.

"You could be right, chief," he said, "but even if you are and get the facts, how can you stop our conspirator short of criminal action? Just about everyone involved has diplomatic immunity to police interrogation. And without hypnotism or truth sera. . . ."

"Jacques," said Rutherford when his aide's voice trailed off, "have you ever heard of proof? I know it's old-fashioned but police *did* use to capture and convict criminals before sera and hypnotism came into use. They went out and dug up the facts."

Commodore Willis said, "The way I heard it, they just rounded up all the suspects and beat hell out of them until someone confessed."

Rutherford winced, said, "Such things undoubtedly happened—but not usually. Especially if the suspects had any standing. Then the police had to find truth that would stand up in court."

Willis sank into a chair and stared at his chief. "But good Lord, sir!" he exclaimed. "How are you going to go about it?"

"I'm going to try to assemble all the facts I can get. Also all the rumors and unproven gossip. Confidentially — very confidentially — I'm putting you in charge. I want you to get somebody from the *Astarte* drunk. Find out why the ship spun in if you can—and find out how it happened that only poor Chen-Smith got carrot-sickness."

"Can do," said the space-aide, sitting up. "Anything else, sir?"

RUTHERFORD smiled at his aide's eagerness even though matching excitement burned within himself. He said, "Perhaps you'll assign the *Astarte* investigation to someone you can trust—because I want you to look up a girl. The name she uses—or used—is Turina Vascelles. She came to see me this afternoon. I want to know all about her—especially whom she knows in the United Planets Secretariat." He went on to describe the girl with the Rex Stout manuscript.

Willis' eyebrows rose. He said, "Turina sounds like quite a dish of tea. I would be off-duty when she showed today!" He added, "What about this manuscript she brought you, sir?"

"I'll take care of that little matter myself," Rutherford told him, getting up. "Remember, Jacques, time is, as they used to say, awasting. I want this information by breakfast tomorrow."

"On my way," said the Commodore with a grin.

"Good luck, Jacques," said Rutherford, wondering why his military aide should have a sense of humor while his civilian aide had none. By rights, he felt, it should be the other way around.

He dined alone that evening and almost at once doubted the wisdom of having done so. For with solitude he began to consider the strange death of Chen-Smith and his thoughts at once ranged to poison. By the time he finished his *potage Ganymede* he was suffering from a fine case of heartburn.

It was his first contact with murder—he had already so labeled it in his mind—and while he enjoyed it vicariously in fiction he found the fact not only undramatic but frightening. Belching unhappily Rutherford decided he could not eat another mouthful.

He was in the act of picking up the manuscript Turina Vascelles had left with him when Mahmoud came in bearing the précis Rutherford had requested.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He regarded his chief with surprise, asked him where he was going. Rutherford told him it was none of his business, relented to say, "Just going to show this manuscript—back by midnight."

Reconsidering the "coincidences" of the past twenty-four hours which had kept him from conferring with Chen-Smith he decided the genuineness of the manuscript was a key factor. If it were real the coincidence theory might hold. If not. . . .

On a non-meeting night the Mystofan clubhouse held only the staff and a few researchers and scholars digging into the microfilm library on the third floor. Rutherford checked through the Rex Stout file first, found that while the Club had in its possession or knew the record or whereabouts of almost all Stout manuscripts, it did not have a copy of *Bad for Business*.

Rutherford sighed, then demanded filmostats of manuscripts chronologically bracketing the one the girl had given him. A few minutes of study in the comparison viewer assured him that his deductive instincts had not led him astray. There was no doubt that the author or his typist had used a different machine on *Bad for Business*—or that it had been typed at a later date, perhaps as a prop in the web of deception of which he was beginning to think himself the center.

He turned in the manuscript for more professional testing, which would determine the period of the typewriter used, the age of the paper and other tiny but conclusive facts. Personally he felt satisfied it was intended as a hoax, probably a temporary one by its crudeness.

Then, on impulse, he turned to toxology. Lichenwasser was listed as definitely non-poisonous, though the laxative qualities of its unprocessed varieties were mentioned. Discouraged, he looked up mineral salts, which were under the same heading, found nothing relevant save in one minute sub-heading, in which it was stated that salts given to anyone taking a sulfa derivitive, could produce death through crystallosis of the liver. He turned to Venerian carrot-sickness—and then he closed the book and went home.

IT WAS a rather haggard Jacques Willis who roused him early the next morning, his eyes alight above the circles beneath them. He mixed himself an antiope, gave Rutherford a verbal report while the latter dressed. "That was quite an assignment, sir," he began.

"Did you find the girl?" the Permanent Secretary asked.

"Oh, I found her all right," said the space-aide. "She's not exactly unknown around the hotel." He paused, fought back a grin, added solemnly, "She works out of Zora MacLean's."

Rutherford needed a moment to digest this. He had accepted the certainty that the peddler of the false Stout manuscript was not what she pretended—but her poise and appearance were scarcely in accord with his preconceived notion of a professional joy-girl. Rutherford, who had all his life shied clear of commercial sex, was shaken, even though he told himself he was an idiot to feel thus about her.

"I called on Zora and managed to worm some facts out of her," Willis went on. He coughed discreetly, added, "We're old friends—it's part of my job to see that visiting space-officers are—suitably entertained while in town."

"I'm well aware of that," said Rutherford drily.

The younger man went on. "Hilda—the girl's real name is Hilda Considine—has been out on call for a couple of days. I finally managed to run her down—and *that* took some doing—by pretending she was wanted by one of the Venerian Embassy's staff. Your little playmate is quite a dish!" He paused for a reminiscent leer.

"You may skip the irrelevant details," Rutherford told him.

"Yes, Your Relevance," countered the space-aide, grinning. Then, "All Hilda

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knew was she'd drawn a chore that included being put into an outfit called Mystofans with phony references to contact you." Willis looked at his chief slyly, added, "I never knew you went in for that sort of frivolity, sir."

"You may skip my frivolities as well," said Rutherford.

The account from then on was concise. Hilda-Turina had carried out orders, had been well-paid by a large amiable gentleman with an eccentric fondness for old-fashioned waistcoats. So, Rutherford thought a trifle sadly, *Brother van Dyne* was one of them. He asked when the girl had drawn the assignment.

"Just a couple of days back," Willis replied promptly.

Rutherford wondered how the conspirators could have prepared the false manuscript so quickly. Then he began to realize to what lengths they had gone in planning. They had evidently had *Bad for Business* ready for some time, had merely called in the girl at the last moment. He asked Willis about the *Astarte.*

"I put Captain Krakauskas on the job," the space-aide told him. "Johnny has friends in the Venerian fleet, including some of the gang aboard the *Astarte.* He had to buy a lot of lichenwasser but he finally dug it out of one of the mates. The Venerians swear their Kennelleys are safe. The first foul-up —the Jersey City one—they're ready to accept as one of those things that are bound to happen every thirty years or so. But the others. . . ." Willis shrugged.

"Sabotage?" said Rutherford.

"They swear it—and a cute job too." Rutherford shook his close-cropped head, added, "They're still working on it—very hush-hush. Oh, and there's no doubt Ambassador Chen-Smith was deliberately poisoned. They found a cache of the stuff in the garbage disposal unit. The chef and his gang got hypnosis and truth sera but nobody knew from nothing. The whole gang's getting nervy."

"I hardly blame them," said Rutherford thoughtfully. "Well, if we can clear the mess up at this end they can stop worrying. Somebody's stirring a thick finger in the interplanetary stew."

"You can say that again, sir," Commodore Willis affirmed. "I hope my work has been satisfactory."

"You have done very well, Jacques—especially for a first effort," Rutherford told him, then added, "You might ask Mahmoud to invite the Martian Ganymedean and Venerian representatives here for a breakfast conference. Eleven o'clock—and be on hand yourself."

"I wouldn't miss it for a trip to Centaurus," said Commodore Willis as he left the bedroom.

WHEN the space-aide had left Rutherford rose and paced the carpet. He felt a stirring in his adrenal glands, a rising sense of excitement. Like Nero Wolf, his idol, he was going to bring the human elements of a criminal conspiracy together and, instead of applying the twenty-first century commonplaces of hypnotics and truth sera, was going to confront them with material elements amounting to proof. And if he handled the situation correctly he was going to save the Solar System from disaster.

But less pleasant emotions undermined his euphoria. What, he wondered, if he were wrong, wholly or partially, in the theory he had reared? What if, instead of triumph and peace, the breakfast conference instead brought failure and with it a quickening of the factors threatening the planets with dissolution?

It was not, for the usually calm Rutherford, a happy time.

The breakfast itself was sumptuous. The long sideboard and even longer table in the large dining room of Rutherford's suite were laden with such comestibles as swamp plums from Venus, moss oranges from Mars and ice bread from Ganymede, to supplement such Earth staples as kumquat juice, plankton steaks, hashed-brown plantains and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grilled shark's tongues. For beverages, along with coffee and tea, there were stone brandy from the asteroid settlements and the inevitable Martian lichenwasser.

Rutherford noted with grim inner amusement that the Venerian delegation ate sparingly, looked green about the jowls. The Martians and their satellite allies showed slightly more normal gusto. But even their usually hearty appetites were restrained by the tension that gripped all present. Politeness was present but in gelid form and conversation was subject to fits and starts like a leaky jet.

Finally, when the table had been cleared, the Permanent Secretary gathered himself and said, "Very well, ladies and gentlemen—to business. I believe all of us are facing problems that demand immediate settlement."

There was a sudden babel of voices, followed by equally sudden silence, as each speaker halted to let the others continue. Rutherford smiled thinly, wished he had not eaten, nerved himself for the supreme effort ahead. He wondered if Nero Wolf had ever felt as unsure as he in a similar situation.

He said quietly, "I hope that for a few minutes you will allow me to talk without interruption. Discussions, questions and explanations may follow when I have finished—if they are necessary."

There was another moment of silence. Juan Kurtz opened his mouth to speak, then closed it and nodded. The others murmured their assent. Rutherford looked at them one by one, then at Mahmoud Singh and Commodore Willis, who sat at the far end of the long table he headed. He cleared his throat, began to speak.

"If possible," he told them, "I want each of you to hear me out with all the detachment you can muster. There are many and complex issues involved and each must be considered in its proper relations to the others. However, the basic problem is an ancient one—it reaches back to the dawn of civilization, when the first small mudhut community branched forth its first subsidiary settlement.

"That settlement grew and solved its own problems of survival—and in doing so came into conflict with the differing needs of the parent community. Ultimately the communities separated—perhaps peacefully but more probably in bloody battle with axe and sling. And thereby was set a pattern that applies down to the present day."

HE PAUSED to fill his pipe and light it; continued with, "The colonies of North America revolted from Britain in the eighteenth century to become the United States. A hundred or more years ago, when the vast British and French and Dutch empires dissolved following World War Two, it looked as if the colonial problem were ended forever.

"But then came space-flight and settlement of the near planets. No one knows better than you how different from life on Earth is existence on Mars or Venus or the Jovian moons or the rough-and-ready asteroids. Each planet and satellite has, in its own way, proved inhospitable to Man, has induced in its inhabitants a return in some form to more primitive ways of life to insure survival.

"To all of your peoples the restrictions imposed by Earth have become increasingly burdensome—as has competition for markets here and on your neighboring planets and satellites. Hardship has bred impatience and exasperation, especially since Earth, with its vast population, has remained the chief market.

"On Mars, with its immense desert areas, new soil is demanded to feed a growing population. It is perhaps only natural that, having already settled the Jovian moons, Mars' more aggressive citizens should eye greedily the moons of Saturn, left fallow by their Venerian owners."

Juan Kurtz' chin set stubbornly and again he opened his mouth to speak.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But Rutherford quelled the bristling Venerian with a smile and a gesture, went on to say, "The people of Venus, with its heavier gravity, resent any attempt to regulate the power of their space-drives in the name of safety on Earth. Such regulation imposes on them a definite commercial handicap, not shared by the inhabitants of the other planets.

"The recent tragic accidents at Lackawanna and the popular reaction they caused have brought matters to a head. Within the past twenty-four hours I have received ultimate from both sides. Venus threatens to bypass Earth entirely in favor of direct trade with Mars and Ganymede. Mars and Ganymede threaten to occupy Titan and other Saturnian satellites by force unless mandate restrictions are changed."

"Which my people will never permit," growled Kurtz sotto voce.

Rutherford ignored him, said, "These conflicts, serious as they are, in themselves present no insoluble problems. Wise concessions by all parties involved, including Earth, could until two days ago have settled them to the satisfaction of all—perhaps may yet do so. Any other course, ladies and gentlemen, is unthinkable. For war, with the weapons that exist today, would inevitably damage and might even destroy the entire inhabited Solar System."

Aloha Svensen, looking like a South Sea Viking woman, said, "War, even total destruction, may under some conditions be preferable to unendurable peace."

Feruccio van Zandt, the Martian envoy, looked unhappy but nodded his support of the bellicose Ganymedean. Rutherford studied them both briefly, then shook his head and said, "I think not. As a preliminary step toward negotiation I sent Ambassador-at-Large Erasmus Chen-Smith to Venus to investigate true conditions and feelings there at first hand. As you know he returned on the *Astarte*."

He paused again, to relight his Oom Paul, told them, "And with his return we pick up another and more dangerous thread. On the final meal before landing Chen-Smith was given an induced case of Venerian carrot poisoning."

"*Induced?*" queried Juan Kurtz, his gaze darkening. "Explain yourself more fully, please, Excellency."

"It is my intention," Rutherford told him. "Honorable, if you will question your ship's officers you'll discover that the poison was recovered from the garbage-disposal unit before atomization."

KURTZ looked about to burst but managed to restrain himself. Rutherford asked, "No why should anyone take such a desperate measure to give an important personage a non-fatal poison? Undoubtedly because Chen-Smith, in the course of his investigation, had it discovered something amounting to guilty knowledge. He was poisoned so that he would be unable to report to me immediately upon landing, thus affording the poisoner or someone higher in the chain of conspiracy time to dissuade him from making a report. When Chen-Smith refused he was murdered viciously in this very suite yesterday afternoon."

"Murdered?" said the Martian envoy. "Chain of conspiracy? Surely, Excellency, such words are a trifle melodramatic."

"I hardly think so in view of the evidence I have assembled," Rutherford replied.

"Evidence?" asked Aloha Svensen. "What do you mean by evidence, Excellency?"

"Concrete proof of what occurred," replied Rutherford. "Statements by witnesses, means and methods, revelation of motive and opportunity on the part of those implicated."

"This is archaic," snorted Juan Kurtz. "May I inquire why such methods were deemed needful in such instance?"

"Because," said Rutherford, "it seemed at least possible that certain guilty parties might be vested with diplomatic immunity to the techniques

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of our twenty-first century police." Then, as a murmur of protest arose, "Fortunately such is not the case. Investigation, however, has disclosed a subtle and intensely dangerous and well-planned conspiracy.

"For instance, the use of carrot poison to keep poor Chen-Smith from talking to me caused us to suspect a branch of the conspiracy aboard the *Astarte*, which in turn caused us to suspect the nature of the recent Lackawanna accidents. We have reason, if not proof, to feel certain that the last two were the result of deliberate sabotage. In this instance truth sera are being applied to the crew voluntarily, should turn up the culprits in short order."

Kurtz actually beamed and said, "Then the spaceport suspension—"

"Will be relaxed as soon as the facts are learned," Rutherford told him. "But to get back—this discovery suggested that Chen-Smith was made ill, later killed, because he had the misfortune to learn that someone *was* tampering with the Kennelleys."

"Just how was Ambassador-at-Large Chen-Smith—murdered?" asked an undefiant and curious Aloha Svensen. "There has been no public report of such a crime."

"Because it has not yet been reported," Rutherford told them. He turned to the pale Venerians and said, "I owe you gentlemen an apology. I have reason to believe you may have suffered some slight indisposition as a result of your visit here yesterday."

There was an uncomfortable stirring among the Venerians. The Martians and Ganymedeans looked curious. Kurtz finally said with a deprecatory gesture, "It was nothing, Excellency."

"It was the poison that killed Chen-Smith," Rutherford stated. Despite a stir of alarm he went on to say, "Do not worry—it will do you no further harm. You see, our criminal substituted unprocessed lichenwasser in the drawing-room carafes of this suite. And when Chen-Smith refused to alter his report, he pretended amiability and offered him a drink—and Chen-Smith died."

"Then why are we alive, Excellency?" Kurtz inquired.

"Because you had not been given an induced and highly aggravated form of carrot poisoning, gentlemen," Rutherford told them. "I have established that during the early miracle-drug era of the twentieth century great care had to be taken not to give patients under sulfa treatment saline laxatives lest they die of crystallization of the liver.

"My poor colleague was first given a powerful Venerian sulfa poison, far more dangerous than any of the sulfa derivitives our ancestors knew, then impregnated with unprocessed lichenwasser. He was dead in but a few minutes. Had we not suspected some of the circumstances surrounding his death we might never have discovered the conspiracy—or at any rate not in time. As it is, I feel safe in assuring you that we shall be able to meet within a day or so and solve our problems without vicious artificially stimulated enmities to hamper our work."

"But what was the motive behind this conspiracy?" Aloha Svensen asked, frowning.

"The oldest motive for crime outside of hunger—power," Rutherford replied. "Our chief conspirator is a man who, through sublimation of his craving to rule the System, is willing in the name of the highest possible motives to let part of that System destroy itself so that he can seize the reins. He is socially as dangerous as a Communist—or a Puritan."

"Who is this murderer?" the woman from Ganymede was beginning to glow with anger.

"Why"—Rutherford looked around the table blandly, "I'm afraid it's my somewhat too-efficient secretary, Mahmoud Singh. He thought of every factor but one when he brewed his unpleasant little brew—a man who never lived. I fear that his literal mind could never encompass such an intangible."

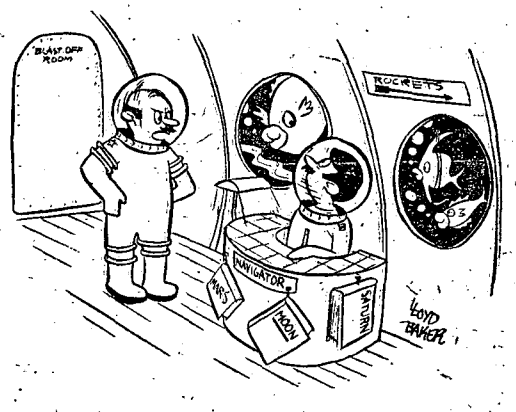
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You're joking, sir," said Mahmoud Singh from the end of the table. "You must need a vacation."

"I'll overlook your insolence, Mahmoud," said Rutherford. "But if anyone takes a vacation it will be you, I fear."

"Who was this man who never lived?" Kurtz inquired.

"His name was Nero Wolf," said Rutherford. "He was a fat figure of twentieth-century mystery fiction"—he paused to look down at his own modest paunch—"who solved crimes by studying people and deducing how they would behave in certain situations." He eyed Mahmoud sternly, added, "No, Mahmoud, it has to be you."



"Well, Davenport, you've done it again!"

"So far I have heard no evidence at all that points to me," replied the secretary silkily. "And as your secretary I am hardly in a position to waive immunity to truth sera and hypnotics."

"True enough." Rutherford was almost jovial. "But we have evidence—plenty of it. Hilda Considine has already talked—and our mutual friend with the fondness for loud waistcoats is currently under hypnotics in the hands of the police."

Mahmoud's dark skin went ashy grey. As he sat there he seemed to shrivel and dissolve like one of the towers of Newark for whose destruction he had been responsible. He said. "You are not fit to hold your post—a trifler, a jester, a player of games." He was speaking directly to Rutherford. "Any System which places a man like you on top deserves the purge it was going to get. And then would come the chance to rebuild. . . ."

"Why, you!" cried Commodore Willis, pinioning Mahmoud's arms as the latter pulled a ray-inducer from beneath his jacket. A flurry of expertly-planted fists reduced the murderer to unconsciousness.

It was some little while before he was taken away under guard and the delegates, their congratulations complete, departed.

Rutherford, feeling at once sixteen and a hundred years old, refilled his pipe in the study and smiled at Commodore Willis, who blurted, "What put you onto Mahmoud anyway, sir?"

"Simple deduction, Jacques," replied Rutherford. "It had to be someone who knew about my belonging to the Mystofans. The members are sworn to secrecy and most of them are honest. It had to be someone who knew my appointments and habits. Once I scented the shape of the conspiracy it wasn't hard to put the finger on poor Mahmoud."

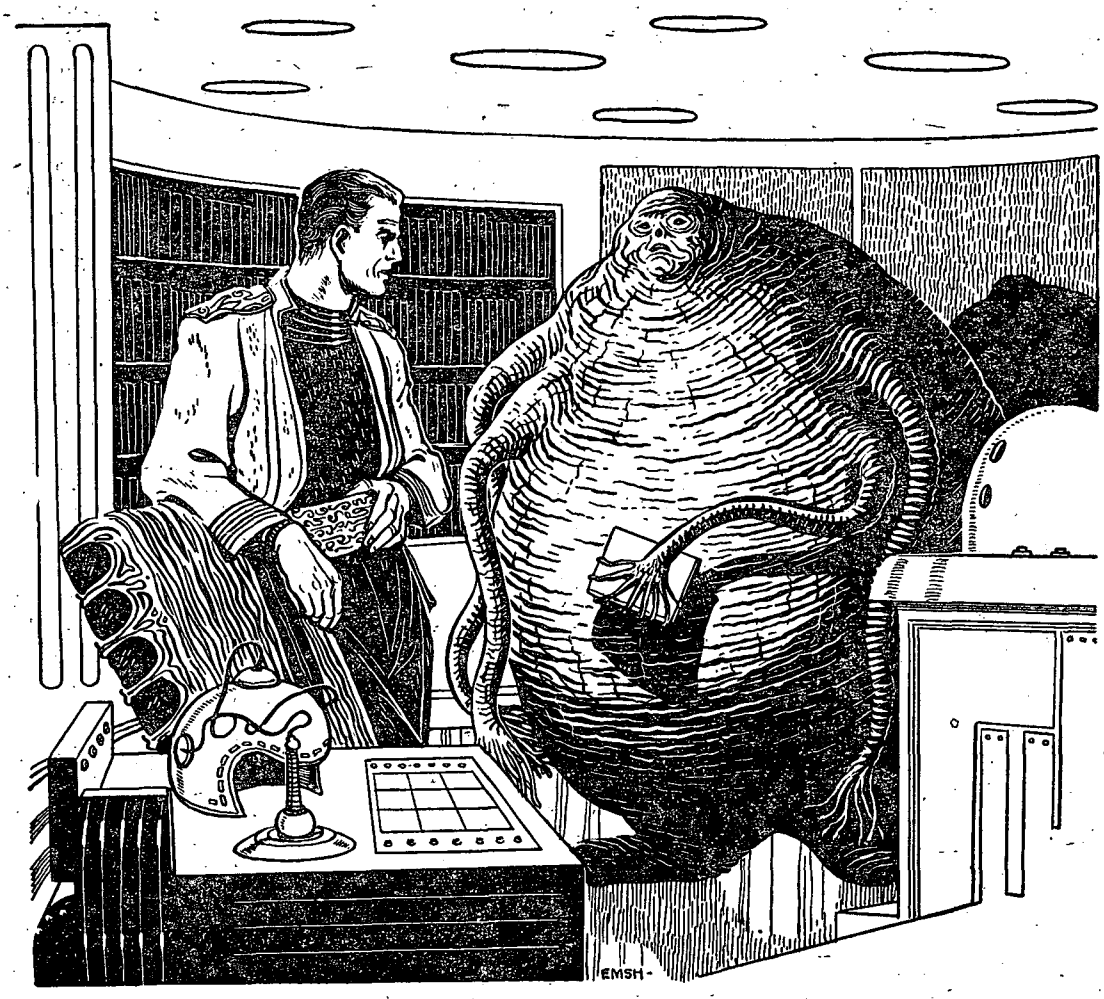
"*Poor* Mahmoud!" Willis snorted. "Why not me?"

"Don't be an idiot," Rutherford told him. "You know I'll transfer you back to space-duty whenever you wish. Why murder to get it?"

"And sit cooped up in one of those tin bathrooms for weeks on end!" retorted the space-aide. "No thanks—there's more action here. By the way, sir, about this—these Mystofans—how does a guy get to be a member?"

Rutherford considered his space-aide thoughtfully, recalled that the action-type had its place in mystery fiction as well as the big brains. He said, "It's not easy but I'll help you with your entrance thesis—*Brother Martin Kane.*"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"Go ahead—borrow all the books you like," said Kent

Green-Eyed Monster

By J. W. GROVES

The aliens were plotting a revolution, but they had no idea how revolutionary!

MRALAN folded his two top limbs into a grotesque knot across his spherical body and bobbed down in grotesque obeisance. "The ways of the man-things have been studied carefully, your highness," he shrilled. "Both in their thought records and in their literature. There is no doubt

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that they do behave in the way you have been told."

Zaban, hereditary ruler and high-priest of the planet Zabana settled more firmly on his short, thick legs. The tiny lump that served him as a head rocked from side to side, and his fat-encased green eyes blinked. "The creatures have very queer customs indeed. But your plan pleases me. We have endured the tyranny of their highest-born too long. If we can use the strange emotions of its own agent to bring about its death, then we shall gain freedom to follow again the sacred ways of our ancestors." He shivered with delight at the prospect, then spoke sharply. "Hurry back to the dwelling of the man-things, and put the plan into effect."

JOHN KENT arrived rather earlier than he had expected, and was not too surprised to find no one waiting at the unpretentious dwelling assigned to him as the Solar Union government agent for the planet. The house servant —what had they told him the thing's name was?—Mralan—should have been there, of course. But no doubt it had taken the opportunity to grant itself a few hours of freedom. On the whole the man was rather glad it had. It gave him a chance to prowl about and settle in with a certain amount of privacy.

He had been exploring the place for about half an hour, fingering Diana's possessions wistfully and replacing them with his own, when he noticed the second shelf of the bookcase. Several volumes were leaning a little to the right, another three or four to the left, the tops of the covers of the center two touching each other. Kent frowned. A book had been pulled out hurriedly and carelessly, a piece of untidiness of which Diana would never approve.

He began straightening things up, at the same time idly checking to find out what was gone. Othello? He shrugged. He wouldn't miss it much; Shakespeare was decidedly outside his line of reading. He turned from the bookcase and began eying the thought-recording machine distastefully. Sooner or later he supposed he'd have to start on that.

He was still looking at the thing when he heard the house-servant come in. Kent turned. He was rather surprised at the size of the creature; but otherwise it was completely as he had been led to expect from the tri-dis and Diana's descriptions. A swelling, leathery-brown body surmounted by a tiny head. Two short, jointless legs. Four boneless arms that were more like tentacles tipped by a bunch of cilia-like appendages that served as gripping members. The man essayed a friendly smile. "You'd be Mralan, of course—" he began. Then he noticed the slim red volume that the thing was gripping in one of its 'hands' and his eyebrows rose. "So you had the missing book?"

Mralan wriggled his bulbous body. "You object? The other man-thing did not mind. It was pleased that we should study terrestrial literature."

"Object? Oh no, I don't object. Borrow all the books you like." All the same, thought Kent, I'll be surprised if you really had permission to take that one. You may not have much of a face on that knob you use for a head, but you can manage to put on a pretty good expression of guilt.

Mralan slithered past him, replaced the book in the case, then went over to the thought-record machine. "You would like me to get the head-set ready for you?"

Kent shook his head, smiled again. "I—I think I'll leave that for just a little while. She was my wife, you know." But then, he thought, you wouldn't know, would you?

Mralan bobbed respectfully and began to slither from the room. Kent let him go. As the door closed, he frowned after the alien with a puzzled expression. How the heck had the creature known that he would want to use the thought records at all? It was an accepted rule of the service that the things should be destroyed unless the position on a planet

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was sufficiently troublesome to justify violating the privacy of the previous governor in search of information. And when that was the case the inhabitants of the planet were certainly not informed.

Then the man shrugged. Perhaps the creature didn't know that, just taking it for granted that since the records were there they were to be used. Either way it didn't matter too much. He pushed the problem aside, went to the large desk in the corner of the room and took out the duplicates of the written reports that his wife had forwarded to Earth.

They were not very informative. Most of the contents had already been sent on to him from Central Office before he had vacated his own governorship to come here. The inhabitants of Zabana, the reports told, were a sexless race, reproducing by a complicated method of budding peculiar to themselves. They were prolific, and going all out would be quite capable of doubling or trebling their population every year. The priest rulers, quite alive to the dangers implicit in Malthus' law even though they had never heard of the gentlemen, had practiced large-scale ritual infanticide until the coming of Earth's rule had enforced contraceptive methods as a substitute. On the surface the change had been accepted without opposition; but Diana had suspected that underneath there was a strong feeling of religiously inspired resentment that at any moment might blaze out into actual rebellion.

IT WAS evening when Kent finished with the reports. Far too late to start on the thought-records. Anyway, he was tired after his long journey, and would be better for an early night. And even though he half-recognized that this was merely a rationalization of a reluctance that had its roots in a deeper emotion, to bed he went.

The next morning, though, not even he could find an excuse for himself. After lingering longer than was necessary over breakfast he dragged himself to the rubber-cushioned seat, sat down, and slipped on the skull-shaped metal head-set. The psychos back on Earth had run out the grief of his loss very thoroughly for him, and he was now capable of facing any reminder of it without an overwhelming revival of the emotions it engendered. All the same it was a shock when Diana's thoughts came whispering into his brain so intimately.

Thought-records are the only practicable way of absorbing another person's knowledge about anything so vastly complex as conditions on a strange planet. They alone can transfer those subtle nuances of feeling, those almost unnoticed and completely indescribable details that can never go into any written report, but make all the difference between really knowing a thing and merely having read about it. Such records have one disadvantage, though. They are too comprehensive. The human mind never stays completely on one thing, and however conscientiously the recorder tries to stick to his subject, little, stray, personal thoughts creep in; usually the ones he is trying hardest to keep out.

Kent wondered whether it was kindness on the part of the Solar Union always to choose the nearest relation to succeed a planetary governor who died. Then he decided that it was. If anyone had to violate Diana's privacy it was better that he should do it.

Grimly he stuck to the task for an hour, absorbing all the information he could, occasionally allowing himself to be warmed by the moments when Diana's thoughts had wandered to him, but avoiding with a chill of horror the nagging little intrusions of worry about her own physical condition that, though she had not known it, were the prelude to her swift death. Then he took the head-set off. That was enough for today. There were dozens of other loose threads that he needed to pick up, and by tomorrow at the latest he must be ready for the usual courtesy visit to the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

planet's hereditary ruler.

He rose and walked swiftly to the door of the room; but so deeply was he absorbed in his own thought that he did not hear the soft thumping of heavy feet as they padded away at his approach.

LATE that night Mralan once again bobbed respectfully before his ruler, and shrilled out a report.

Zaban nodded. "And has the man-thing reached the part in the records that we want it to?"

"Not yet your highness. But soon it will."

"Good. Tomorrow I shall sow in its mind seeds that will sprout and bear fruit in that hour when it does."

Kent's visits to the planet's priest-king followed the usual pattern in civilizations at Zabana's stage of development. There were the numerous bows and bobs, the long interchange of flowery compliments customarily exchanged between one great ruler and another. At long last the man was able to get down to the business that most vitally concerned him.

"I have been checking the records left by the previous governor of this planet," he said. "It seems there exists some discontent with the Solar Union's law that young ones should be prevented from growing, instead of being killed after they have budded and broken off."

Zaban nodded and threw his arms out sinuously. "There is a great and powerful party waiting for the chance to free our world from the irreligious rule of the Union," he said shrilly. "And widespread desire for the death of your Preselect."

Kent had expected an evasion, and the frankness of the reply disconcerted him. He raised his eyebrows. "I see," he said drily. "Well, if you should happen to meet any of the leaders of this party please tell them that they would be well advised to try to be content with things as they are. The Solar Union is the most powerful organization in space, well able to enforce any rules it makes."

"Of course," replied Zaban shrilly. "It is fully understood that so long as the Preselect rules we must obey. But I thought it as well that you should be informed that the feeling exists."

Kent nodded. "All right, and so I've been informed. And now, if you don't mind, I want a thorough report about the precise steps your law enforcement organization is taking to ensure that no infanticide is being perpetrated—"

The leave-taking at the end of the interview was as wearisomely formal as the greetings had been. It was late evening before Kent reached his quarters again, and he arrived there in an uneasy state of mind. This might not be Denmark, he thought grimly, but there is definitely something rotten in the state. Zaban's suppression of infanticide was efficient and thorough. Yet the brute had several times returned to and emphasized the theme of how ripe the planet was for rebellion. Almost as if he expected the news to be welcome.

It had been Kent's original intention to have a restful evening with a book when he got back. Now he changed his mind. If any clue to Zaban's behaviour was immediately available it would be found in the thought-records. And he needed all the clues he could get.

He had been sitting in the cushioned chair with the head-set on and his eyes closed for nearly half-an-hour when the shock came, striking him with almost the effect of a physical blow. He sat up suddenly, and jerked off the head-set, then put it on again and turned the recorder back so that it re-ran the last few memories. He couldn't have received that last bit correctly. . . .

But he had. It was all there. A fond little memory that had wandered into his wife's mind between her various thoughts on the religious system of Zabana. A memory of a flying visit to Earth to see the Maytime celebrations of the anniversary of the establishment of the Union: and of someone who had met her there, someone with whom she

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had exchanged passionate kisses and murmured words of love. . . .

IT WASN'T an unusual type of memory to find in a woman's mind; but—the trouble was that the date was wrong. Planetary governors were allowed only a fortnight's leave on Earth every three months. Diana and he had taken theirs together regularly beginning in January of each year. In May she should have been on duty in Zabana.

Kent took the head-set off again and looked at the record machine with violent distaste. Despite the intermittent nature of their union he had always regarded his marriage with Diana as a happy one. The last thing in the universe he had expected from the records were revelations of this type; and if there were going to be many of them his task on this planet would be doubly heavy. He rose to his feet and began walking up and down the room. Apart from anything she might have done there, how the hell had Diana ever got permission to go to Earth in the middle of a duty period, anyway?

A chair got in his way, and he kicked it irritably aside. The whole thing was so damn silly. He could not believe Diana had had a lover. Yet? But if she had she must have known that he was bound to find out—or must she? He would never have dreamed of such a thing if it hadn't been for the records. And he would never have had occasion to use those if it hadn't been for her sudden death, which she could scarcely have foreseen.

Had the affair, he found himself wondering, been just a casual thing, a mild flirtation that had never developed into anything more serious? After all, a few kisses weren't so terrible. Many a woman had given that much away, and yet remained a faithful wife. But Diana had taken the trouble, somehow, to get herself special leave on Earth. That didn't sound like anything temporary. . . .

He turned at the end of the room, and his eyes fell on the record-machine again. His stomach knotted with revulsion. Damn it! he didn't want to go on working with that thing. Whatever Diana had done she was dead now, and she should be allowed to take into her grave with her any shabby little secrets she might have had. He had no right to pry.

Then his mouth twisted wryly. No right, maybe. But he'd darned well got to just the same. Something was badly wrong on this planet. He could feel it, sense it in the attitude and conversation of everyone he met. At any moment something might break, something that it would take a man with years of experience to handle. And the only way to acquire year of experience quickly was through the thought-records.

Reluctantly he crossed the room again, sat down, and slipped on the head-set, firmly resolved to pay heed only to thoughts that concerned his work. But, after all, he was a human being. As the machine whirred softly on he began to pay less and less attention to the affairs of Zabana, started to wait more and more tensely for his wife to let slip thoughts of any other adventure she might have had.

At length some came. There was no means of identifying the date this time, so whether this incident occurred before or after the first one that came to her mind he could not tell. But the details were much the same. A few stolen days on Earth, an exchange of fierce kisses, and murmured phrases of love. Phrases, he noticed wryly, couched in terms more passionately poetical than any she had ever addressed to him. . . .

BITTERNESS began to eat into him. He gave up all pretense of being interested in Zabana, set the records to move at greater speed, his fingers hovering over the control to slow them when they reached the only parts that mattered to him now. Before long he was pressing his fingers down, focusing his attention again. And this time he found

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an interloping memory that betrayed details of things more personal than mere kisses or words. Much, much more personal.

He jerked off the head-set, stared at it with loathing. On a sudden impulse he raised his voice in a shout. "*Mralan!*"

The globular alien came through the door, weaving its arms and bobbing respectfully. "You wish for me?"

"Yes. listen! My—er—the previous governor of this planet. How often did she visit Earth?"

"Why—four times during your Terrestrial year. Once every three of your months."

"Was that all?"

The pale green eyes of the creature began flickering round the room, looking everywhere but at the man. Its whisk-like hands whipped back and forth nervously. Kent's voice grew savage. "Well?" he snapped. "I asked you a question. Was that all?"

Mralan's squeaky voice tremored a little. "Tell me, honored governor. If a man-thing makes a rule, and later the man-thing dies, must the rule still be obeyed?"

Kent struggled to keep his voice even. "Not if it is afterwards canceled by another man-thing," he said. "Now tell me. How often did she go?"

"In the first year it was only once. But after that it happened more and more, sometimes two or three times between the official holidays. In the last year the planet was almost without a governor."

"I see." Kent choked the words out. "All right. You can go."

As the door closed he flopped back into the seat and started drumming his fingers on the arm-rest. So the whole of Zabana knew that he had been cuckolded? And doubtless the greater part of Earth knew it too. He flushed deeply at the thought, and had a sudden impulse to drop the whole thing. Radio his immediate resignation back to headquarters, then set off for a planet of some other sun where nobody would know him, where he could change his name and start a new career and a new life.

But that would mean that some other appointee would come here and read Diana's thought records. Unless they were to get accidentally smashed. . . .

He couldn't do it. He had never been the type to make a great show of patriotism. Indeed, in normal conversation he had always taken the easy way and adopted the fashionable, slightly derisive, air towards the Union and its imperial policies. But deep in him there was a core of loyalty and devotion to duty that would not allow him to destroy for purely personal reasons irreplaceable, valuable information about the critical political situation on this planet.

His lips twisted. Well, he thought bitterly, if I can't run away and leave them for someone else to read, and I can't smash them or ignore them, then there's only one thing left to do.

His hand went out for the head-set. As he reached for it another thought occurred to him, one that sent through him a flood of sullen amazement. He didn't even know yet who the man was! Never once had Diana referred to him by name, always by sub-vocalized 'he,' or maybe just a warm glow of delight associated with the vague concept of 'another human being. Kent growled softly to himself and jabbed the head-set on. Well, at least she wouldn't have kept that up for ever.

IT WAS late that night when Mralan again dipped his spherical body in front of his ruler and began to report. Zaban listened keenly, interrupting with impatient questions. "And after the man-thing had commanded you out of the room, what then?"

"I crept back, and listened at the crack of the door. Before long the machine-that-records-another's-thoughts began to whir."

"And this time it reached the part we wanted it to?"

"So."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And how did the man-thing react?"

Mralan's body began to tremble, blancmangelike with excitement.

"So. When it came to the right part in the records it jerked as if it had been pierced by the sting of a winged prelan. Then it lifted its head and shouted in a loud voice 'The Preselect! Good God! The Preselect, my wife's lover.' And it bent its arms in front of it and lowered its head into them and with shaking shoulders gave out strangled sounds."

An aged councillor spoke from behind Zaban. "It knows that according to their own code its mate has sinned with its ruler. It knows that in this world there are many who hate that ruler. Its next actions are as predictable as those of the moons that ride the night-sky."

Zaban hugged himself. "It is so. At the most, two or three months should see the sweet fruition of our work."

IT WAS, to be precise, two months and and two days later that the priest-king stood beside the planetary space-field, watching a gleaming sliver in the sky grow larger and larger. Beside him stood a number of his ministers, with Mralan now taking his rightful place at their head. And behind them were lesser rulers from all over the planet.

The sliver swelled into a silvery fish-shape, and then into a shining bulk too huge for its true form to be realizable. With a soft swish it landed on the field. A few seconds passed, then a man dropped from a newly opened lock and walked over to the assembly at the field's edge. As he walked, he tugged a paper out of his pocket.

Zaban stepped forward eagerly. "You come from the man-thing named Kent?"

The man nodded. "Yeah."

"And did everything go as planned?"

"Exactly as planned." The man glanced down at his paper. "Are you all here?" And he began to read out a list of names. Then in a leisurely manner he slid his hand into another pocket. Then with a whip-like movement he flashed out a proton gun and pointed it at Zaban's middle. He spoke into a disk strapped to his wrist. "Okay, boys. Come and get them."

In another ship, ten thousand miles behind, Kent gazed at the scene through video. Beside him was the Preselect, who had weeks ago decided that this was an occasion important enough to justify personal supervision. Behind the pair of them stood a knot of men in military uniform. Kent chuckled softly as he watched the arrests.

One of the men in uniform spoke. "You're sure we've netted them all?"

Kent nodded. "All the important ones, anyway. After I'd found out what I was supposed to find out they let me meet all the higher-ups in the party so that we could hatch plots together. They are all there."

Another man broke in. "It's surprising that even then they trusted you that much."

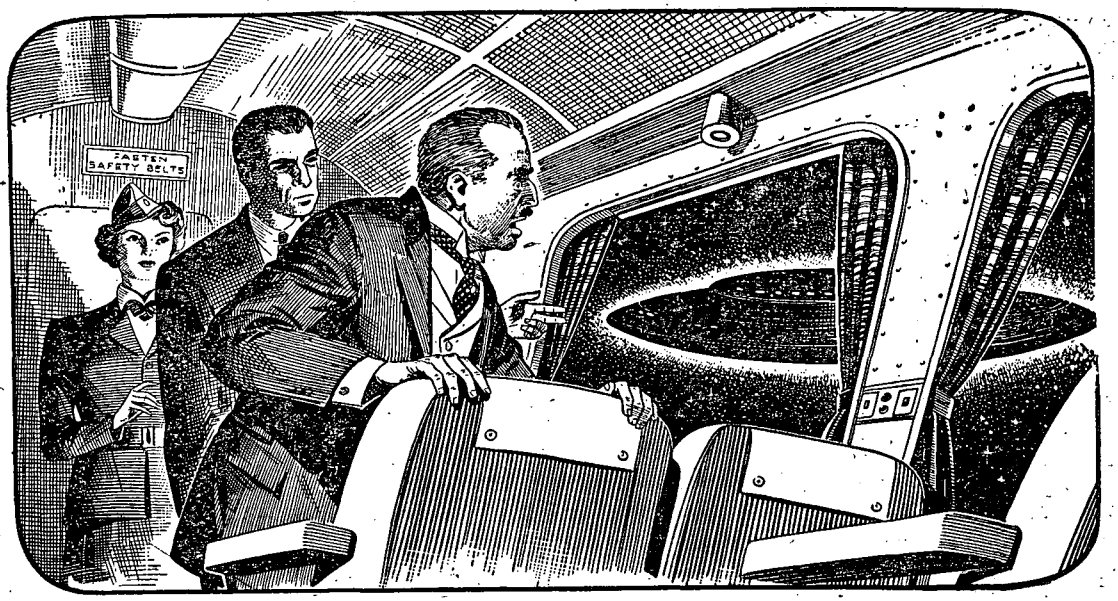
"Not really," replied Kent. "You see, they thought they understood human psychology. They felt sure that after I'd contacted the faked passages in the thought-records I would have a deep and deadly hatred for my wife's secret lover—"

The Preselect, who had been gazing silently at the screen of the video looked up and caught Kent's eye. Immediately each of them began a smile which turned to a chuckle, then in Kent's case to a hearty guffaw.

Suddenly the Preselect stopped laughing and spoke soberly. "It has its comic side, but really we should be taking it seriously. These creatures have greater technical skill than we realized, to be able to fake a thought record; and it was a diabolical scheme they hatched, to use you as an agent to murder me and help in the overthrow of the Union. And if I'd been different, and you'd been a less balanced type, the first part of the plot at least might have succeeded. That wouldn't have been a joke."

Kent's smile faded, and he nodded gravely. "It certainly would not have been, madame," he agreed. ● ● ●

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



He could see the flying disc outside the window

FLIGHT 18

By PAUL A. TORAK

Mr. Bradbury had no idea

he was a collector's item. . . .

MR. BRADBURY was angry. Fog or no fog, the airlines should stay on schedule. Lack of planning, foresight, sense of responsibility—that was the trouble. He felt like cursing.

"Damn!" said Mr. Bradbury.

But a voice on the public address system announced that Flight Eighteen for Chicago was ready to leave. He raised his considerable bulk from the chair in the dimly lit waiting room of the airfield and checked his watch. No way to run a business. He shook his head and snorted indignantly.

Such a snort is worthy of note. It was an utterance that could be made only by a corporation lawyer in the prime of life. It was a nasal explosion connoting wealth, confidence, and a singular lack of imagination. It was a snort fed on T-bone steaks, good Scotch whisky, and bicarbonate of soda.

Mr. Bradbury peered myopically around the waiting room. A few minutes ago, while washing his face in the men's room, he had broken his glasses in the wash bowl. Although he hated to admit it to anyone, he could see next to nothing without those thick lenses. The room was an unpleasant blur, but he was able to determine that he was the only

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would-be passenger in the waiting room. The others were drinking coffee in the airfield's restaurant.

"Flight Eighteen," said the voice on the speaker. "Flight Eighteen."

Mr. Bradbury shrugged his heavy shoulders, picked up his bag and briefcase, and stepped out the door into the fog.

The mist hung thick and low over the airfield, cloaking the damp night air in a morbid blanket of gloom. Mr. Bradbury blinked sullenly into the shroud-like vapor.

"What the hell!" he swore. Can't even see the plane, and, he thought, floundering unhappily into a wire gate where in blazes are the rest of the passengers? Are they going to fly through this stuff?

"This way, sir," said a feminine voice, and he saw a dim, uniformed figure in front of him.

The hostess. Glad someone knows where he's going, he thought, and then he followed the girl toward the now visible lights of the plane.

"Watch your step, sir!" she said as he walked up the runway.

He grunted. Making these things steeper all the time, he thought.

The hostess was a pretty dark-eyed young thing, plump in the right sort of way. Mr. Bradbury leaned back in the soft, cushioned seat. It felt good.

"Fasten your safety belt, sir." She helped him with it.

"And I do hope you'll be comfortable," she said in a soft, low voice. He caught the glint of black eyes, jet and sparkling.

He smiled at her appreciatively. "I'm sure I will," he grinned resisting a sudden impulse to pinch her cheek. The girl walked down the aisle toward the door again, hips swaying provocatively.

A young blossom ready for the plucking, thought Mr. Bradbury. A succulent young partridge ready for the—Mr. Bradbury chuckled to himself happily on thinking of the many women he had known in his fifty years.

He looked around the plane. No passengers, except for a pleasant looking young man sitting across the aisle from him, a young man thoroughly engrossed in a small, paper-bound book, the title of which Mr. Bradbury could not discern.

He wished he had his glasses, for he was getting a slight headache. The lawyer leaned back in the soft seat and closed his eyes. Well, headache or no headache, life was good, and he was glad he was alive. Then Mr. Bradbury fell asleep.

WHEN he awoke the plane was in flight, and looking out the window, he could see nothing but darkness broken only by an occasional cloud formation. The man across the aisle was staring into the blackness outside, the book he had been reading discarded and left lying on the floor.

Mr. Bradbury stretched himself and looked around him. The plane had been darkened and apparently only he and the young man were awake. He yawned. A great conversationalist, Mr. Bradbury craved discourse. But where was the opening wedge necessary to break the bond of silence between himself and the other passenger? Then his eyes fell on the book lying on the floor. He picked it up and held it close so that he could see.

The title had something to do with "flying saucers" and the cover illustration, a lurid affair, showed a green skinned, globe-headed, tentacled creature equipped with a tiny rocket motor on its back, an expression of what was supposed to pass for lust in its face. The thing was carrying away a beautiful, thinly clad earthgirl, her face contorted with fear. In the background hung a disc-shaped space ship hovering over a burning earth city.

"Rubbish!" said Mr. Bradbury in a loud voice so that the young man across the aisle could hear him.

"I beg your pardon?" asked the other passenger, turning away from the window, eyebrows raised in question.

"The book you're reading," answered the corporation lawyer. "Rubbish!"

The smooth-faced young man blushed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and smiled apologetically. "Well, I suppose you're right, but it's sort of fun, you know, reading this sort of thing."

The lawyer chuckled condescendingly and shook his head. He turned the book over in his hands almost fondly. He wished he had his glasses so that he could read it.

"It's sort of refreshing, if you know what I mean," continued the man as if feeling some further defense of his choice in literature were necessary.

"Rubbish!" chuckled Mr. Bradbury for the third time.

A shadow of annoyance registered on the young man's face.

The lawyer put down the book and extended his hand across the aisle. "Bradbury is the name," he said. "Represent the Hotchkiss Oil Industries. Oil is my business!" he added impressively.

The young man hesitated for a moment and then accepted Mr. Bradbury's hand. The lawyer reflected momentarily that for a frail-looking young fellow the chap showed an amazing strength in his handshake.

"Tarkas is my name," said Mr. Bradbury's new acquaintance. "Oswald Tarkas."

"In business, Mr. Tarkas?"

"Well no," laughed Mr. Tarkas nervously, "not exactly. I suppose you might say that I just sort of putter around. I work for a museum."

Mr. Bradbury frowned. He had never known anyone who just sort of "puttered around" in museums. He wasn't quite sure that he approved. Such an occupation seemed vaguely un-American, subversive, although he couldn't quite say why.

"A museum? What museum?"

Oswald Tarkas hesitated, looked at the floor, and then answered almost timidly as if he expected some reprimand.

"Well, it's probably not too well known—the Canal City Museum."

"Ummm!" muttered the lawyer. "No, can't say that I've heard of it. Where is it? New York? San Francisco?"

OSWALD TARKAS had turned away for a moment and was staring out the window. The motors of the plane hummed pleasantly giving a sense of comforting power. The plane's cabin was dark except for the lights over Mr. Tarkas' and Mr. Bradbury's seats.

"Oh no!" replied Mr. Tarkas. "We do have our branches in those cities, but it's a bit difficult to pin us down. We're more or less a research outfit. Sort of an international organization, if you know what I mean."

Mr. Bradbury didn't, but he nodded his head agreeably. "And what do you do for the museum, Tarkas?" he asked.

"Well, I'm what you might call a collector—of sorts," he added. "Yes, I sort of collect things in a way—you might say."

The lawyer, a great student of human character noted that his new acquaintance wore a crew cut. His face was thin and looked clean-cut except for a slight weakness around the chin.

"Well now, Oswald," he said, "you don't mind my calling you Oswald, do you? I like to be friendly."

"Not at all," flushed Mr. Tarkas happily. "I like to be friendly too. When my work permits," he added.

"I have a lot of respect for museums," ventured Mr. Bradbury. He had never been in a museum. "Cultural institutions, that sort of thing," he went on waving his hand. "My company often makes contributions to worthy institutions. Maybe I can do something for your outfit."

Oswald Tarkas seemed appreciative. "Now that's awfully kind, and, you know, we accept all contributions gratefully. We take what we can get."

There was an embarrassed pause in the conversation. Then Mr. Bradbury remembered the book he held in his hand.

"This book!" he said holding it up in his hand. "Nonsense!" he scoffed shaking his head. "Know what the flying saucers really were?"

"Well—" started Oswald.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Balloons!"

"Balloons?"

"Weather balloons!" assured Mr. Bradbury emphatically. "Weather balloons! That's all they were!"

Oswald looked as if he were about to say something, but didn't.

Mr. Bradbury, obviously enjoying himself, drew two expensive cigars from his coat pocket.

"Have one?" he offered.

Oswald hesitated and then accepted. He put the cigar in his breast pocket.

"But," stammered Oswald. "What about the witnesses? The National Guard pilot, the airliner pilots, the army anti-aircraft observers?"

The lawyer drew in the rich tobacco fumes, and tilted his large, handsome head.

"Hallucinations!" he said. "Mass hysteria!" A smile of amused indulgence lit his large, florid face. Oh, oh, what a world of fantastic notions was begun by that first atomic explosion. Now, for example, the notion that these so-called "flying saucers" are extra-terrestrial." Mr. Bradbury waved the very idea away with a gesture of dismissal. "If there are intelligent beings from another planet in control of these hypothetical spaceships, why haven't they contacted us by this time?"

"Well," suggested Mr. Tarkas thoughtfully, "maybe they have their reasons. Maybe you can't judge the actions of extra-terrestrial beings by terrestrial standards of conduct."

"And the meteors," continued Mr. Bradbury ignoring Oswald's last remark. "The meteors make space travel impossible. Do you realize that every day our atmosphere is burning up thousands of those meteors? Do you know that just one of those meteors the size of a pea could smash right through the thickest armored plate and wreck any rocket?"

Something small and glowing smashed into the outside of Mr. Bradbury's window and ricocheted off into space.

"What was that?" asked Mr. Bradbury half rising from his seat.

"I don't know," answered Oswald. And then he added jokingly, "Maybe it was a meteor."

The lawyer stared out the window, but still he could see nothing but blackness. He settled back into his seat again, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well now," he resumed, "as I said. The meteors. Can't escape them."

"But," suggested Mr. Tarkas defensively. "Couldn't the rocket sort of 'scoot' around them?" He simpered as if embarrassed by such a ridiculous notion and made a half-hearted gesture with his right hand that Mr. Bradbury assumed was a "scooting motion."

Mr. Bradbury dismissed this contention with a wave of his cigar.

JUST then the airliner gave a sickening lurch to the right and something big and luminous roared past the plane. Mr. Bradbury bellowed. "Roughest damned trip I've ever had."

"It makes me nervous, too," said Oswald.

"Now another thing," said the lawyer. "This business about men from Mars."

He looked uneasily out his window.

Oswald smiled. "No truth in it?"

"None! Anyone with even a token knowledge of science knows that the Earth is the only planet that can support human life."

"But," answered Oswald, "suppose that planets could be inhabited by something other than human life. Like that thing on the cover there." He motioned toward the book Mr. Bradbury held.

Mr. Bradbury laughed, about to explode this fallacy with another barrage of devastating logic. He was interrupted.

"Say, Brad. You don't mind my calling you Brad, do you?"

"Of course not," smiled the lawyer affably.

"You say there's no such thing as flying saucers?"

Mr. Bradbury inhaled from his cigar and shook his head. "Hallucinations,"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he said positively.

"You're sure of that?"

"Stake my life on it!"

"Well I'm sure glad of that because for a long time now the damndest hallucination I've ever seen has been flying alongside of us."

Mr. Bradbury rose from his seat, stepped across the aisle, and looked out Mr. Tarkas' window. He squinted out into the darkness. It was there all right. No wings, disc shaped, rows of lighted windows, luminous vapor emanating from the rear.

"Damn!" exclaimed Mr. Bradbury and pressed the button for the stewardess.

She came quickly down the darkened aisle.

"Flight Eighteen!" she said blankly. "Flight Eighteen!"

Mr. Bradbury stared.

"Did you ring, sir?" she asked.

"Good Lord yes!" said the lawyer. "Look!" He pointed to the window.

The stewardess, plump and pretty as ever, didn't look, but with amazing strength pushed him down into his seat.

"This way sir," she said smiling pleasantly.

"What's going on?" roared Mr. Bradbury starting to rise again from his seat.

"Watch your step, sir," answered the stewardess giving him another shove. "Fasten your safety belt, sir," she said, and before the lawyer could protest again, he found himself fastened down in his seat.

"And I do hope you'll be comfortable, sir," she said in a soft, low voice. He caught the glint of black eyes, jet and sparkling. She turned, took one step up the aisle and stopped.

"And I do hope you'll be comfortable, sir," she repeated. She stood there motionless, as if paralyzed in the middle of the aisle.

"And I do hope you'll be comfortable, sir," she said again. "And I do hope you'll be—"

Mr. Tarkas stifled a yawn, rose from his seat, and stepped over to the girl. He reached out and twisted her ear. Her voice stopped and her back slid open like a secret panel, revealing a maze of whirring, clicking machinery.

"What—what—" stuttered Mr. Bradbury. "She's a—"

"A robot," smiled Oswald Tarkas happily. He turned from his examination of the defective machinery. "She's not a very good robot. Her vocal mechanism jams now and then, but she serves the purpose. You'd be surprised how many of you we catch this way."

THEN Oswald touched a wall switch. The darkened plane blazed into light. There were no passengers on the plane other than Oswald, Mr. Bradbury, and the robot stewardess that stood silently in the aisles.

Mr. Bradbury could still see the flying disc outside the window. Oswald saw the direction of his glance.

"Friend of mine," he grinned.

The lawyer looked wildly around the empty plane. "Where—where are the passengers?" he croaked, a numbing suspicion growing in his mind.

"No other passengers," answered Oswald standing there, still smiling. "You just got in the wrong boat, Brad, old fellow."

The cabin of the airliner was changing. It was beginning to look like something very unlike an airliner cabin. The seats dissolved into walls which seemed to expand in the shape of a circular room, a large disc-shaped compartment lined with machinery, tanks and dials, glass cages of sleeping terrestrial animals. One large cage was empty. Mr. Bradbury stared at this unoccupied glass cylinder.

"Yes," grinned Oswald, "for you! But don't worry. Just pass it all off as a hallucination. Want to see where we are, Sport?"

A panel opened in the floor, and Mr. Bradbury looked out into the black void of outer space. And there in the center of that panel of darkness was the planet Earth, a tiny silver ball rapidly diminishing in size.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What are you?" screamed Mr. Bradbury struggling against the belt that held him in his seat. "What are you?"

"A collector," said Oswald Tarkas tearing off his head and revealing underneath the disguise a small globe of bone and flesh, two glowing eyes, a mouth filled with many white, sharp teeth. "A collector," it repeated as the false arms and legs and torso were ripped away revealing a shapeless green body equipped with spindly tentacles that waved obscenely at Mr. Bradbury. "Of sorts," it added as it moved toward the frightened lawyer.

Mr. Bradbury screamed.

"Rubbish," it giggled. "Weather balloons, hallucinations," it chirped gaily, and writhing, snakelike appendages reached out for the twisting, screaming hysterical figure of Mr. Bradbury.

And through the empty reaches of the cosmos two tiny discs hurtled toward Sol's fourth planet.

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

touch with someone who can construct a good story, but lacks the story material. We could bounce a story back and forth through the mails and maybe come up with something. I can supply outlined plots on everything from humor and murder to cowboys and rockets.

Do you think anyone would care to try it? I have read that some writers use mechanical gadgets to obtain plots. I have a drawer full.

Any help you care to give to this matter will be greatly appreciated.—*643 Robinson Courts, Texarkana, Texas*

Your problem is now a world-wide problem. Writers everywhere are hereby invited to worry with you or to collaborate with you as they may choose. Just one of the services supplied as part of the entrance fee by this incredible column.

I REMEMBER MAMA

by Lula B. Stewart

Dear Sam: Way back thar, circa 1928, I read a science-fiction mag, and was infected. This chronic derangement might have culminated in the virulent stage known as actifandom at a very early date had not fate intervened to save me. While I was madly cerebrating over my first epistle—it had to be both significant and scintillating—another damsel sent in a missive to ye ed.

That dawdling undoubtedly saved my hide, but, Oooo! what happened to the other poor maiden! It shouldn't be done to a diploid! I can still hear the primitive screams of the man-pack echoing down the corridors of time. The rage of that mob was something awful to behold. Not only was I witness to that early kill, but cowered in my cave as other foolish females tried to run the gauntlet. (You male fans who wail plaintively, "I can't see why the gals are so belligerent," hunt up a few copies of those early reader columns. G'wan, I dare ya.) Yes, I listened, shivered, and hastily swallowed back all those witticisms and criticisms that are the birthright of a stf fan.

For, the First Law is—SURVIVAL!

Now, at last, in the dawn of a new era, I dare creep forth, and claim my heritage of egoboo. In the interim I have entered wedlock, produced two offspring, and survived the arrows of outrageous fortune accruing to such states. This Spartan training welded a will of iron, and hammered out a hide impervious to attack. So, at last, backed by a formidable phalange of femfans, I dare speak up, brave lassie that I am.

Permit me one last look at the long, thin line of both gems and grislies that have flowed from the pens of our splendid staff authors through the years, and afforded hours of incomparable reading pleasure. There was Leigh Brackett's DANCING GIRL OF GANYMEDE, wonderful, memory-stirring mood piece—and so many whose titles are lost in the mist of time.

Oh, to think of all the praise I might have meted out—and didn't! Ah, to remember the unuttered howls of protest (quit kissing my hand, boy—stop thanking me). 'Tis true, the saddest words of tongue, or pen—

(A hankie, please Sammy, that I may wipe the dewy drops from these dim old orbs—after you, dear boy, after you.).

Ah, well, frustrations gone, I, too, am a genuine, *tin carrot* neo-fan, and contributor to that great, new, all-female Femzine (who's trying to sneak in a plug?). Once fandom appeared over the far horizon as a strange, uncharted land, but all that is changed, and I feel *so* at home. This familiarity was bred the moment I learned, with unholy glee, that fandom, like all the rest of good old aberrated humanity, has its rigid social structure, too—a pyramid of subtle gradations that culminates in that awesome capstone, the mighty BNF (Big Name Fans, to you igerunt uninitiates).

Remember the Big Name back in kindergarten—the kid who always hit and bit the firstest with the mostest? Or, the Jackson in high school who sported the loud attire, and louder larynx? Of course, we older and wiser adults use no such trifling yardstick in electing our Big NOise—pardon, Name—a BN of the suburbs is judged strictly by the intri-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cacy of his TV antennae these days!

So, here's to fandom's BNFs—be it him or her (especially if her name ends in Bradley):

I've never captured a BNF (pronounced B'niff)
And if I did, I'd free one
They got rights, too,
Tho', still 'tis true,
I'd druther see th'n be one!

You may not print this one, Sam, you misled old misogynist, but just the same, you'll be seein' me around. This feudin', frolicin' fan-fun is mighty heady stuff for us old timers.—*%Osmond, R. D. #1, Harmony, Penna.*

This fascinating bit of tribal history has touched us upon a tender spot—one of the few tender spots we have left. The days when the occasional femfan cowered in fear of the wolf pack are only part of our wistful folklore. Now the once lordly male takes to cover as the Amazons ride. And drunk with power hammer out the deadly cacophony with which the female has, from time immemorial, subdued the surly male. Ah, yes, power corrupts and hell hath no fury like a woman scorned and—by the way, have you dug slit trenches and rigged up the barbed wire around your post office yet?

A NOD TO STURGEON

by Sherwood Springer

Dear Sam: In April TWS Theodore Sturgeon prefaced a remarkable comment on my so-called "thought-provoking" story, NO LAND OF NOD, by surmising that "it could be that Mr. Springer won't be too happy about the thoughts it provokes."

Permit me, in turn, to preface my rebuttal with the assurance that when any writer of Mr Sturgeon's stature chooses to expend the thought and effort required for 800 words of criticism concerning any story Mr. Springer writes, Mr. Springer will be anything but unhappy.

To begin my defense of the treatment used in NO LAND OF NOD, I must point out one fact, the materiality of which, as it bears on his criticism, Sturgeon, as a writer himself, will immediately recognize. It is easier today, with the story canonized by the respectability of print, and with other tales like THE LOVERS and WHAT'S IT LIKE OUT THERE? behind us, to stand up and say how far we could have ventured in defiance of present-day mores. The fact remains that NOD was written in 1951, a full year before THE LOVERS appeared. At that time even Sam Mines had not yet fully donned his halberd in this latter day crusade for freedom of expression.

During the course of several bull sessions early in 1951 with several writers, including Frank Quattrochi and Floyd Wallace, I thought up the theme for NOD, which provided fuel for much discussion. The consensus, however, was the story would be difficult to write, impossible to sell. Later several editors had an opportunity to voice their opinion which was, succinctly: "Too hot to handle." The theme, however, remained a challenge, and the tale was written. But—

My length of rope was limited. I felt as strongly as Mr. Sturgeon that it was a story that should be written, but writing it was not enough. It was a story which should be *printed*, which is something else again. The secret must lie in the treatment.

It is all very well to speak objectively of exploring in fiction the mores of other frameworks than ours—and "go all the way" in such exploration—but the fact remains that said mores, if they happen to be repugnant in our own framework, and particularly if they haven't previously *been* explored, are apt to arouse considerable trepidation in editorial quarters. An editor isn't obligated to risk the protests of readers or, even more important, the ire of his boss, the publisher. A little old rejection slip is too easy a way out.

Bearing all this in mind, I was forced to examine and discard many approaches. In questioning why Jim waited until Esther was 18 before he reached his decision, Mr. Sturgeon overlooks the very mechanism I employed to remove much of the objectionable connotations of the situation. It was Esther, triggered by the final letter of her mother, who took the initiative in the matter, thus removing the onus which Jim's mind had attached to his making the first move.

Mr. Sturgeon finds this struggle of Jim's incredible in the light of how quickly other forms of conditioning vanish when man is placed in a stigma-free atmosphere, citing those against killing and against open nakedness. I concur with his thesis as it applies to most, if not all, conditioning, but I'm not convinced that man's aversion to incest is so easily dealt with, and I submit that the soul-searching of someone like Jim in Jim's predicament would not be, as he terms it, "absolutely incredible." We are dealing here, I feel, with mental and physical complexes more deep-rooted and intricate. Conditioning against killing, for example, is largely cortical, and the moment such conditioning is removed, voluntary muscles obey the command to squeeze a trigger. An approach to incest, however, involves not only these aspects, but also certain involuntary reaction to stimuli, over which the brain has little or no conscious control. I feel certain the psychologists would find here sufficient grounds for controversy.

Jim's character, vide his apparent lack of success in life illustrated by his applying for a temporary job at the age of 39, and his reluctance to face the realities of which Ann is repeatedly forced to remind him, should provide further background for the plausibility of his conflict. It is Ann, throughout the story, who is fired by the profound responsibility which is theirs as the new Adam and Eve. Jim tags along, more or less reluctantly.

Sturgeon's objection to Jim's waiting the four or so unnecessary years until Esther reached eighteen is a logically sound one and, I'll agree, in real life it would be an extremely jeopardous postponement in view of the fact Jim's life might be ended by illness or accident at any time. The fault here, however, still does not lie with Jim since, as he is depicted, it is quite probable he *never* would have reached his decision. It was Ann, the mother, who dictated the age at which Esther must force the issue if up to that time it had not already been consummated.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here again, however, the writer felt the tug of the rope. Choosing the arbitrary age of 18 was frankly an effort to remove to some extent one objectionable aspect of the theme, and I regret Mr. Sturgeon regards it as so serious a flaw.

It's quite possible, Sam, that if other editors side with you in pioneering toward freedom from taboos, an era may soon arrive when writers, in dealing with other frameworks may not have to make concessions to the proprieties of this one, concessions which have been so necessary in the past. I echo Mr. Van Riper: "Autre temps, autre mores!"—*8558 Holloway Dr., Los Angeles 46, Calif.*

This extension of Jim's psychology (touched upon only lightly in NOD itself) suggests another story. The key idea is Springer's suggestion that Jim probably would never have made up his mind himself. The women forced the issue. And this coincides with our own theory that the average male usually never does make up his mind—that it is always the woman who forces the issue, even in normal relationships. This is not necessarily because man is the weaker sex, it is because man is perpetually divided in his desires, whereas woman is totally single-minded in hers. And if she is sometimes a little disappointed in the male she selects she knows superlatively well how to make the best of it. Many a woman starts out by being aloof, but quickly learns that half aloof is better than none. (Sorry, couldn't resist it.)

HIGHER EDUCATION
by Dick Clarkson

Dear Sam: Thish of TWS was really a shock to me, and I'm not pulling any punches! It was ghodawful . . . ghastly . . ghruesome. I expected the run-of-the-mill shorts, which I got, but my Ghu, the long ones! They were the worst of all! Knight's *Turncoat* was unreadable, *Mother* by Farmer was nothing what I'd have expected after reading his *The Lovers*, the shorts were horribobble . . . I better shuddup before I carry myself away.—*c/o Harvard U, Lionel B—12, Cambridge, 38, Massachusetts.*

Sorry to have cut your letter to an emaciated shadow of itself, but we kept all the gruesome parts for a change and took out the flattery. It's a switch.

AND MORE
by Rev. C. M. Moorhead

Sir: I've read some terrible stories in TWS and I have received some issues of TWS that I considered poor, but the April issue takes the prize for sheer horror!

There wasn't a story in the whole issue that made it worth two bits. That MOTHER thing by Farmer made me gag. If I want any information about embryology I'll read a medical text-book. Should I wish to read about the tendency of some adults to retreat into the "womb of the world" I'll read text-books on psychology. I certainly don't need it in my recreational reading!

Of course you, and other readers, will take this to be a contradiction of the above paragraph, but the truth is, I liked THE LOVERS. But this MOTHER thing left me in a vile mood. Shortly after reading it I was seized with an attack of the flu accompanied with violent seizures of vomiting. I think MOTHER had something to do with it!

But the story that filled me with fury and caused me to give off large, angry, blue sparks was TURNCOAT by Damon Knight. A scurrilous attack against Christianity; a sneer from beginning to end of all that is held sacred by the Christian; an intolerant and prejudiced presentation in story form of the intolerance and prejudices of its author! That story belongs in the privy with last years Sears and Roebuck's catalogue! Of all the contemptible yarns that I have read, TURNCOAT tops the list.

I have no serious quarrel with an atheist who declares flatly that he does not believe in God or anything that pertains to God. But when he sets himself up as an authority on the matter and sneers down the length of his pointed nose at the rest of us who do believe in God, then I take up arms against him. I know some theists who are brilliant men and I know some atheists who are "damned" fools. I know some Christians who are brilliant men, and I know some of them that are "damned" fools too. Whether a man believes in God or not does not make him a fool; he is a fool when he becomes so blinded in his own thinking that he cannot see the other man's view point. When a man in a story, or by some other means, indicates by implication that all Christians are fools, he places himself on the end of a limb where someone is liable to saw him off!

"Quick, Henry, the saw!"—*Community Church, Kelleys Island, Ohio.*

TURNCOAT struck us as a fictionized attack on modern high-pressure advertising, not religion. It was a portrayal of the means by which people may be made to believe anything—the exact opposite of truth if necessary. It was done in Germany, it is being done in Russia. I don't believe Damon Knight had any interest in attacking Christianity and we didn't get that kind of reaction from the story at all.

As for MOTHER, it was admittedly clinical, but the obvious purpose was to show how a weak man may retreat from life. Exaggeration is a legitimate tool of the dramatist. MOTHER may have enraged you, but you won't forget it as you would a more innocuous story.

NO CHRISTMAS CAROL
by Carol McKinney

Dear Sam: After hearing so much about MOTHER in the April ish of TWS I really expected it to be something! So Farmer did handle the theme "with rare and outstanding honesty"—so it was still nauseating! And six other gals I write to thought it was worse than that. So what

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

now? All letters panning said story wind up in file 13??? (Naturally!—Ed.)

THE DIPLOIDS made the mag worth buying, though. You're forgiven, Sam. Katherine MacLean's stories are generally always excellent.

That cover! Did you forget to put the story inside it was supposed to represent? Or in these new days of stf—"The Breaking of the Taboos," are covers only considered for themselves alone and never mind if they illustrate a story or not? Even in the old days of the Triangle (Bem, undressed Fem, and Hero) the cover at least came *close,* now they miss entirely. Let us in on the new policy, huh, Sam???

Why are all the stf stories the past few months, or at least the greatest majority of them, running on in such a hopeless and despairing vein? Seems like all the authors have lost their optimism or try to write with splitting headaches. (So you ask who can be optimistic with a splitting headache? Maybe they'll come up with a story about a super-aspirin.)

I see you've let Calkins back in the fold. Have you really forgiven him, Sam, after that nice letter he wrote?—*385 No. 8th East St., Provo, Utah.*

Our arm is getting tired, explaining about poster-type covers which tell a complete story in themselves, instead of limiting themselves to one scene in a story, which may not be self-evident—see?

So you think our authors are a little pessimistic? How about H. G. Wells, back in 1898? Just caught an advance look at Paramount's release of George Pal's version of WAR OF THE WORLDS—if that doesn't scare you out of ten years of growth I'll be startled. The present gloom is a reflection of anxiety and uncertainty. Takes a determined optimist to keep smiling. Are you determined?

HYDE AND SEEK
by Gene A. Hyde

Dear Sam: A couple of months ago I bought copies of SS and TWS for the first time in about four years. My, you've changed. And pleasantly too, I might add.

I started reading SS and TWS shortly before The Sarge, Xeno, *et al* were liquidated. That was a big change. Now we have a new editor, better stories, and, low and behold, trimmed edges and no (well at least fewer) triangle covers. When I think back over the many fans who used to scream for these last two changes. And now they have them. Verily there must be singing in the streets.

Unfortunately my return to the field occurred one month after THE LOVERS and NO LAND OF NOD saw the light of print, but I have a vague idea of what they were about from the letters. Sam, do I detect a trend developing in the issues since? Especially the last issue of TWS. I refer to MOTHER. I realize that Farmer is the same guy who wrote THE LOVERS and I'm certainly not panning either story, but please let's not break out in a rash of "taboo" stories. And there are indications of the trend in other stories in both mags. I enjoyed the first flying-saucer story I read, but after the fifth or sixth they began to leave that certain taste in my mouth. Know what I mean?

MOTHER led the stories of course. The others were not outstanding. I have two questions to ask concerning ROBERT. What were the two humans doing in a city of robots and if the robots wanted to get rid of the humans why go to all that trouble? The thing seemed a little unnecessary to me.

And, Sam, in THE DIPLOIDS you have created another mistake (do you create mistakes?) in math. Factorial 24 is not "24 plus 23 plus 22 and so on." This would not be a large number at all as large numbers sometimes go. Factorial 24 would be 24 *times* 23 *times* 22 and so on, which would indeed be a fairly large number.

Would also like to say that I agree with Anthony K.'s little sermon on mores.

May I stick in a personal word on the end of this? I would like to renew a correspondence with one Evelyn Short. She used to be a fan. If anyone knows her please ask her to write to me.

Would also like to hear from any fans in the Peoria area.—*Lacon, Ill.*

Relax, we are not in the reform business and don't intend to specialize in taboo-busters. At least not for their own sakes. The point we tried to make is that we don't like to turn down a very good or very remarkable story because we are afraid of a taboo or two that is busted in the telling of it. That's a different thing from being a professional tabooster, which would get monotonous itself after awhile. Feel better?

Your mathematics I ignore. Algebra was the only subject I couldn't learn in school, even though the teachers tried to hammer it into my skull. They used real hammers, too. It hurt.

OKAY OKIE
by Rita Wieland

Dear Mr. Mines: I must be a retarded mutation—here I've been an avid Science Fiction fan for almost 20 years without writing a single letter to an Editor, and this is my third in the past month!

But, seriously, I want to say that I liked what Gregg Calkins said in his letter about fans being broad-minded and open-minded. There are so many prejudices in the world today that I sometimes wonder why we call ourselves civilized people. I have never seen a fan letter from anyone in Oklahoma, and don't know any StF fans, except my husband, who finally succumbed to the attractions of my magazines, and my 4-year-old boy, who loves the Bems and space ships on the covers. However, if his statement is true, perhaps we need a StF political party to counteract the many narrow-minded, pompous, stuffed-shirts who are so prominent today. Maybe I'm in the wrong part of the country to expect an unbiased viewpoint on either color or religion, but I've lived here practically all my life, so how did I get this way?

Anyway, I do enjoy reading your magazine, and all the others I can afford—there's so many new ones published now that it's hard to keep up with them. And we'll soon have to build another room on the house to keep all my back issues, which I hope to index someday.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I, too, enjoyed Farmer's story THE LOVERS—it's one of the best stories I've ever read—but didn't care too much for his current one MOTHER. However, NO LAND OF NOD was definitely more thought-provoking, and I liked Mr. Sturgeon's letter regarding it, tho I'm not as critical as he about the details. I also enjoyed DeCamp's VIRGIN OF ZESH, but like some of his earlier Krishna stories better. The mating of different species doesn't seem objectionable to me.

I personally don't think this April issue of TWS is as good as the last two issues, but you can't have everything all the time! I'm already waiting for the next copy of TWS and SS.—*2130 N. W. 13th, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.*

Offhand we can't give you any addresses in Oklahoma, but when the fans see your letter you'll get them. Won't be long before you are pining for the solitude you once enjoyed. . . .

WITH A PROVISO
by Paul Mittelbuscher

Dear Sam: Now this Philip Farmer is a promising writer. Possibly you were aware of that fact, but as one who hasn't as yet read the much ballyhooed LOVERS I wasn't so sure. Frankly, I don't believe he is (as publicity would have us believe) the "new" Weinbaum, however, he does show startling originality at least the concept of MOTHER was new to me.

The April TWS needn't apologize to anyone for its quality. Damon Knight's novel was very entertaining even though it had nothing particular to say. I found no moral in it is what I'm trying to explain. Perhaps it was meant to warn us against huge chain stores? Though I doubt that a situation corresponding to that in Knight's yarn will arise at any period in the future. The Lawrence illos for TURNCOAT seemed to be of the hastily done variety, what did you do, give him a round 5 minutes to dash off two illos? Sam, don't you realize artists are temperamental and require lots of time to do good work? (Nobody rushes Lawrence—Ed.)

Mrs. Dye (or Katherine MacLean to you peasants . . .) was slightly reminiscent of Van Vogt with her DIPLOIDS. Did I hear remarks to the effect that women can't WRITE . . . just refer the unbelievers to THE DIPLOIDS. ROBERT was the worst of the shorts, the rest were adequate. I remember this Sloan from a '49 issue of PLANET. Rolf Martell's thing was a surprise . . . sort of old fashioned but not bad.

I found Anthony Riper's letter most interesting. Concerning sex and the future . . . my own personal belief is that as soon as a satisfactory and socially acceptable method of artificial breeding is found most women will refrain from marrying. The War between the sexes although treated as a joke is a REALITY. Many women actually resent men and would be glad to eliminate us, in part this is our own fault because of our stupid attitudes and treatment of them. One needn't look far to discover why they regard us as "providers" instead of true loving mates . . . men practice a "double standard" of morals as anyone familiar with the sex life of the typical male can tell you. Stag nights . . . the office "wife" . . . the insane reasoning that fosters the idea that being unfaithful is not a crime if practiced by the MALE but IS if done by the female. Yes it's easy to see the reasons why women would like to deempathize the importance of the male and make it a "woman's" world. However, too few of them actually have the courage to make a career for themselves and as a result drag any available male who has money (or prospects of making money) to the altar in order to avoid "spinsterhood." In other and plainer words the "romance" which one is subjected to in movies, books, etc., does not exist in real life . . . few if any girls marry for "love," the dominating factor each considers before choosing a mate is "How much will he earn?" Consequently I believe that "career girls" instead of being sneered at should be applauded, for at least they have the determination and guts to make their own way without acquiring a "provider" . . . may the Diety see fit to deliver me from the horrid fate of becoming a "provider."

As to this person who not so long ago urged you to "Keep sex in the bedroom" I have only this to say . . . do you (Ralph Wade, wasn't it?) think putting sex in the bedroom renders it any purer? If you regard sex as "dirty" then you must regard ALL sex as dirty . . . the mere fact that one obtained a marriage license before letting fleshy desires hold sway means nothing. In other words the mere fact that one is married does not make sex any cleaner . . . any mother who holds this view "I would never allow MY child to have any of that nasty SEX education," is a hypocrite because she must have allowed sex to play a part in her life . . . otherwise how come she has children? To successfully ignore sex one must (1) Have nothing whatsoever to do with the opposite sex and by no means get married (2) Cease to read magazines, books, watch television, attend movies or attend any mixed gathering (3) Retire to outer Mongolia and become a monk, hermit or mystic.

In closing may I remark that although the Coggins cover was a good job, we (bend down your ear Sam, so I can whisper) "WANT SCHOMBURG ON FRONT COVER." You hear? A person called Schomburg we want . . . get to it . . . I have spoken.—*Sweet Springs, Missouri.*

Missouri isn't so far from Ohio, maybe you and Rev. Moorhead could get together on TURNCOAT. Am expecting an indignant letter from the Chain Stores Association any moment.

INTERPLANETARY SAMBA
by L. Sprague de Camp

Dear Sam: For the benefit of R. R. Cameron (TWS), Je. '53, p. 135) and any others who might be interested in the genesis of the Viagens Interplanetarias series, the facts are:

I have never been to Brazil and do not speak Portuguese. However, my old friend and collaborator Fletcher Pratt has and does, and I get my Brazilian background and lingo from him. I did serve as an officer in the U. S. Naval Reserve in World War II, but as my work was entirely scientific and technical I was never sent out of the United States.

When I started the series in 1948, I was tired of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the bland assumption of some of my colleagues that the galactic culture of the future will be an exclusively Anglo-Saxon affair. In casting about for a set of assumptions that would make a series of romantic adventures like these more or less plausible, I recalled hearing Pratt say that Brazilians boast that when the USA and USSR have eliminated one another, Brazil will be the world's next leading power, and cite statistics in support of their surmise.

I therefore took this idea as an assumption for the stories, not because I think it the most probable outcome, but because it is at least as plausible as many assumptions on which stories have been based. And having made this assumption I had to stick to it throughout the series.

I agree with Mr. Cameron, however, that the idea for the series has been pretty thoroughly exploited by now, and while I may write one or two more stories in that setting I doubt if I shall go much beyond that.—*Wallingford, Penn.*

Goes another bubble of illusion. We're sorrier than anyone else that you've never been to Brazil, Sprague, because we were just about to ask you howcome they raised the price of coffee four cents? Now we'll probably never know. Unless we ask Fletcher Pratt.

YOUR LITTLE HAND IS COLD

by V. J. Davidson

Greetings Sam: Once in a blue moon, I decide to write to you types. Tonight the moon is normal but I'm mad.

Reason?—One of your authors has dropped a large, heavy brick right on my pet corn.

Please, Sam, won't someone tell J. Farmer that "Che Gelida Manina" is a TENOR aria, and that while a baritone might conceivably try it over in private he would never record it?. If he must name names; why not Rossini's "Largo al Factotum" or Bizet's "Chanson du Toreador," both well known BARITONE arias?

Reference, by the way, is P.J.F.'s "Mother"—April ish.

Outside of his attempts to include matters operatic, the yarn was well written and well up to standard for T.W.S. Good luck to him in the future.

One more Sam, and I'll shut up. Could you or one of your readers Please (pretty Please in fact) help me find a copy of T.W.S. dated Dec. 1949, lead novel, LET THE FINDER BEWARE.

Until the next Blue Moon, all the best.—*2025 Wilson Ave., Toronto 15, Ontario, Canada.*

Our face is red—Farmer did say Eddie was a baritone, didn't he? Still, Eddie hadn't recorded the aria for professional purposes, only for his own amusement, so there was no reason for him not to sing it if he wanted to. And you know that a good baritone can sing tenor, just as a good tenor can sing baritone. I've heard Tibbett sing tenor and Caruso sing baritone—that dates me for real, doesn't it? I've sung Che Gelida Manina myself, but I'd hate to tell you what it sounded like.

MONEY'S WORTH

by Mrs. Bertha Sundet

Dear Sam: Just got the Apr. ish of TWS. Read the letter section—hmmm—rather short was it not? Only 10 letters. Weren't any of the rest worth printing? Almost seems as though one has to be praising or plugging something to get into the letter section. Well this time I am praising something, in fact two things (if stories and people can be termed "things"). I hate to do this as I'm spoiling my record, but never let it be said I can't recognize good science fiction when it appears, anywhere.

I've just read two stories thus far, and now I'm afraid to read the others for fear of a letdown after these two. The first one was ROBERT by Evan Hunter. Now there is one of the best short stories I have read in many a day. Very thought provoking and proof positive that *good* science fiction can and does exist in short stories.

The other is Philip José Farmer's MOTHER. At first I felt a little sick to think that Eddie never got enough courage to break away from that possessive "mother influence"—and prize freedom or even death above personal bodily comforts. Then I suddenly realized this was likely Farmer's very purpose in leaving Eddie a weakling all the days of his life, and the final result thereof, retrogression. After all the story was never meant to be the hero type. It was about MOTHER—and showed what an insidious, destructive thing a mother's love (if love this kind can be called) can be. Love that isn't love, because it seeks to inflate her own ego by feeling that she is great because she seeks to always stand between her child and personal discomfort or danger. Thus tying him further to her through dependence on her; destroying all initiative, all desire for anything save personal physical comfort. Proving also that knowledge and intelligence alone, do not make a real or courageous person out of an individual. In this sense, Farmer did a most magnificent job—and in a very few words besides.

Unlike Gregg Calkins (who is a very nice boy—and intelligent as well), I like short stories and novelets better than the long ones unless the long ones don't drag perceptibly—many do. It seems to me, it may take patience and a great deal of hard work to write a novel; but it does not necessarily take more skill. In fact to get an idea across in few words is often more difficult, be it stories or letters, huh?

And so, congrats are certainly in order to both Hunter and Farmer—and you too, Sam. I hope the other stories won't let me down, but even if all the rest are stinkers, I'll still figure I got my money's worth this trip. Yours for more stories on a par with these two.—*Lake Preston, South Dakota.*

P.S. We always answer all mail we receive within one or two weeks, whether we agree with the other's point of view or not. Common courtesy demands it. Wonder what's the matter with Dave Hammond and Marion Z. Bradley? We wrote them months ago, along with several others. I'm sure they are no busier than we are. Five children help much in that direction; thus it would seem they just might be disinterested in other's opinions,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wouldn't it? Wonder exactly what kind of people that makes them. Maybe they are very nice people, but we'll never know it until we hear from them.

PPS. I'm much interested in this new fan club, started by Marion Cox of Sioux City, Ia. and intend writing her about it. By the way, we are only 180 rd. miles, 120 air miles from Sioux City. She's almost a neighbor, huh?

In the case of stories, we have adopted the old system—"never explain; your enemies won't believe you and your friends don't require it." If we could remember the author we'd give him a byline—was it Teddy Roosevelt? Anyway we thought (and upon re-reading, still think) that MOTHER was a remarkable, if clinical story, and we have little doubt it will head for an anthology. The very fact that there is so sharp a division of opinion indicates it is a strong story. Nevertheless we won't argue about stories, which is not to say that we don't appreciate your temperate defense.

PARNASSUS PASSES
by (Mrs.) Willa Mae Blevins

Dear Mr. Mines: I have been a science fiction fan for about six (6) years and I really enjoy reading any and all science fiction stories. Some, I must admit, I don't like as much as others but as a rule there is one so exceptionally good that it makes up for the others so that I find no reason to complain.

As to the covers, I am interested in art as art and not for the dressed or undressed state of the figures. After all the artists may subconsciously think that women may be more immune to the weather, etc. (My husband is an artist too so perhaps that also colors my viewpoint. Don't start wondering if you have seen any of his work for the only ones who have are those who sent rejection slips for his cartoons and his instructors at college. You should see his BEMs and robots as well as his girls, landscapes, etc.)

I have a suggestion which I would like to pass along to all fans, and that is for those of you who (right word, I hope) aren't saving your mags for a library of your own. Call your local library and and ask if they would like to have them, I think you will be more than a little surprised to learn that they too are interested in science fiction but due to limited budget many of them are at present unable to buy them. I can assure you that they will be sincerely appreciated too.

I learned this only recently because we are moving away this summer and we wondered what to do with our own collection, it was only by a sudden impulse that we inquired at our local library and thus found a new home for our mags where they will also be read by others which probably would not have been possible otherwise.

I like science fiction very much and I hope that you will gain new fans through the circulation of all mags put into circulation through this or any other method.

Will you print this plea for the help of other fans in this matter and please forgive my long winded letter?

Oh, yes, I also agree with Tom Pace. I am from Georgia myself and I think that racial prejudice is as stupid as it would be to dislike someone simply because they wear a brown or blue suit while you wear a gray one. I believe all humans are fundamentally the same underneath so what difference can the covering make? Not that it makes any difference, but to keep the issue straighht I am a gal (I guess a woman of 23 can be called a gal) of white Irish and Scotch ancestry.

Now, Sam should I hunt out the nearest atom bomb shelter and take cover? Maybe so but I'll stand my ground and stick to my guns.—*Apt. 65 Donald Ct., Huntington, W. Va.*

Naturally, we are certain that every one of our readers is interested in art, not in the mere coincidence of a girl on the cover. It is remarkable of course, that so much great art consisted of nude female figures instead of machines or manhole covers, but that's the way things are.

As to your experience with the library, we can corroborate that. Our local librarian told us that all the boys and very nearly all the girls were now reading science fiction and that it was impossible to keep a book or a magazine on the shelves. They were pathetically grateful for whatever came their way to supplement an always-meager budget.

THE DELUGE
by Richard Geis

Dear Sam: I'm somewhat late with this letter about the April TWS because of a situation that has been building and developing for some time. More about that later.

The cover was certainly different and at the same time provoking. Why do you run a cover like that without a story built around it? Exasperating. Men on an alien water-world investigating and exploring in specially built spaceship find capsule containing body of human. And this time she does not awaken.

TURNCOAT by Damon Knight was the best story in the issue even tho it struck me as being somewhat chopped off at the end.

MOTHER by Philip Jose Farmer was excellent. Farmer certainly portrays human relationships with a great deal of Truth and keen observation. Or somethin'. They Ring True.

Sam, on my bookcase waiting to be read are *eleven* magazines. All science fiction, all containing good stories I want to read, and all a victim of the above mentioned situation. I read a lot. I read more than I should. And eighty to ninety percent of that is science fiction. And yet I'm falling behind. I can't keep up with the staggering flood of science fiction and fantasy that has struck the field. It's Amazing. (whoops, bad word) If I were fair, Sam, SS and TWS would be read in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turn. As it is I read them as soon as I can finish the current mag in order to write you a letter that isn't three months late.

What am I to do? Cut down on some of the magazines? Unthinkable. Read more? Impossible. I guess I'll have to store them up against the day when The Next Depression kills off half to two-thirds of them.

Wha' Hoppen' Only a few years ago I couldn't wait for the next issues to hit the stands. Now, I dread the next issues. The months go by so damn quickly, and the mags pile up higher and higher.

Sam, if you were ordered to cut a magazine or two, which would you cut? Would FANTASTIC-STORY get the ax? SpS? Which is expendable?

Too many mags, too many mags, too many mags, too many mags. . . .

Maybe you should write an editorial on the situation.—*2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon.*

You've got a problem, all right. Most of us go selective and read the things we like best, admitting the impossibility of reading everything. But you had to be a real fan and try to read it all. We try to read the competition once in awhile to see how the other half lives, but it's impossible to do much and still cope with the huge task of keeping up with our own submissions. As for cutting down—you've seen the announcement in JuneSS; it became necessary to cut down. I hope the result will benefit the quality of the entire field.

SARTORIAL MALES
by P. A. Engle

Dear Sam: Is the illo for "The Ship Was a Robot" by Murray Leinster, drawn by notable Emsh, your answer to the constant Fem-fans' appeals for more males in the pics? If so, some answer. Who looks like that?—*Box 421, Brookings, S.D.*

Jeepers, we were wondering if anyone would notice!

YE IVORY TOWER
by Maurice H. Cox

Dear Sir: I've been reading WONDER and STARTLING and their predecessors for about a quarter of a century and I would like to say that they are getting to be odiferous and it's not a nice smell either. Take some of the recent stories. Such topics as rape, incest, sodomy, and now in HALOS, INC. something that comes close to blasphemy.

In my opinion one man writes all your stories. They are turned out by the mile and chunks are cut off.

Most of the junk you are publishing is certainly not science-fiction.

I am not a religious man and have no use for religious bigots. I also have no use for people who sneer at other people's religions.

It seems to me that propaganda should be kept out of magazines, whether for a good cause or a bad one. People who wish to forward their political views should publish political pamphlets.

However, if a writer can be really amusing and really interesting, quite a lot can be tolerated, but that is not true of your tired hack. That story MOTHER in April TWS was completely Freudian. Both Freud and Hitler were produced by the same city, Vienna. Freud demonstrated that man was an animal, Hitler took the matter a step further and actually turned him into one.

You should always be careful in publishing stories that try to break down existing beliefs. Nature hates a vacuum.

Well, anyhow, try and keep things a little cleaner.

You do publish some good stories occasionally. STEPPING STONE in March SS was very good. THE AMBASSADOR FROM THE 21ST CENTURY was fair. TURNCOAT in April TWS was fair. I looked through FANTASTIC STORIES March, trying to find something that would grade as high as fair, but couldn't see anything.

Back in the "thirties' covers used to have some relation to the stories. Is that impossible today?

Dont talk too much about modern stories, some of the stories published in the thirties have never been surpassed and very rarely equalled.

Marc Duquesne in the "Skylark of Space" was more alive than 95% of real people.—*General Delivery, Vancouver, B.C., Canada.*

The secret is out. Now the world knows how a magazine chain operates. In our case, publishing science fiction, we have a distinct advantage. Sure, one tired hack turns out all the stories, but this one is a Procyon native with three heads. One head turns out SS, the other TWS and the third takes care of FSM and SpS. The heads have distinct characters too and their own names. Reading from left to right they are Jim-jam-Jim, Jo-go-Jo and Jac-ack-Jac. It's Jac-ack-Jac who has the flair for space opera and many people think he is George O. Smith. This is the first time the truth has been told. Jo-go-Jo likes color in his stories and there has been much controversy as to whether his real name is Jack Vance or Henry Kuttner. We can assure you it ain't so. The third head no one ever mentions. Better that way.

OLD STALWART
by A/2c James B. Hardin, 14404226

Dear Sam: Here I embark upon another voyage over "Ye Olde Editors Desk." I sail on with joy and sorrow and disgust at times, but my faith in TWS never falters.

I enjoyed "What's It Like Out There" very much. In fact it was the issue's best. There should be a lot of praise headed your way. Being

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a member of the military at the present time I can testify that this story is true to life. Seldom is any service the pageantry and glory it's made up to be.

Sam, me boy, your covers are better than I've seen in ages. Also the entire magazine is better than ever. In fact Sam, I ain't going to say one little word of slander, libel or Seibleisms (oh unmentionable name).

I am interested in joining a fan club of some sort. Any clubs interested in taking on a lone, stray fan, please get in contact with me, please

Among your recent stories I have enjoyed "The Virgin of Zesh," "No Land of Nod" and the Manning Draco trilogy.

Thanks a million for a swell magazine Sam, keep the ball rolling.

Anyone interested in swapping letters?—*1906-3A.A.C.S. Det., Mountain Home A.F.B., Idaho.*

Idaho seems to be the one state from which we have never noticed a fan club. Leave us piously hope this was merely an oversight.

ONLY TWELVE LETTERS

by Joe Keogh

Dear Sam: I *could* start this letter out, "Go take a flying leap," intended as a blunt hint at how DELERIUM ON DENIM ever slipped through the filter, and into TWS, (Or do you *usually* hang around F.F.F.'s editorial offices, disguised as a janitor, emptying reject baskets?) and I would be justified in commanding you to eject yourself through the venetian blinds, and fourteen stories down—IF all the stories in April TWS were like that. Thank ghu that (there I, "ugh", go again) they weren't.

In fact, on the whole they were quite exceptional. Now permit a few very pointed dissections. There were two main story ideas this April: the bio-chemical stf, and the semi-social, economical, and religious stf. The latter was Damon Knight's TURNCOAT, one of the most original ones in months, and the two former were Joe Farmer's MOTHER, and Katherine MacLean's DIPLOIDS.

Unless stf-fen are taking courses in political economics, my guess is that they went for the bio-chemical series. I did. On further analysis, we find that the most original idea goes to Knight, maybe the reason for being lead short novel. THE DIPLOIDS came a close third, slightly outranked by MOTHER.

Now many men will agree with me that we have heard the tale of unaware freaks or mutants before, a many many times. But they will also concede that THE DIPLOIDS was very well-written, and fast-moving. No two stories are exactly the same, but SLAN, and RING AROUND THE SUN came pretty close to it. Besides there were a few aspects in the plot that other stories have never touched . . . . that is why I give it priority over another not-too-original plot, MOTHER. (And Sam, ere you forget, just *what* was that editorial comment about uniqueness supposed to mean?)

I could go on and on praising TURNCOAT, for it seems to me that Knight must have gone into the subject pretty deeply, to come up with all the possible mental and emotional conflicts such a situation would create. It was the most believable of many a s-f story I have read, and I wouldn't be surprised if it is chosen for an anthology. There was only one part that got on my nerves—don't you think the Dean did a bit too many "ums" and "ahs"? So ring up the winning pennant for TURNCOAT!

That makes three good reasonably long stories in one ish. And a medium from four shorts (OASIS). Pretty good average!

But a few gripes: In TROUBLE AT THE TRAINING TABLE, the story was humorous, but you can get that by picking up a copy of 10,000 jokes. No scientific, or even psuedo-scientific explanation for what happened! Don't tell me Priestly got his idea from those doctors over in Denmark!! Maybe they should've written the story! And the letter column. . . ugh! Only twelve letters!!??? Think how many more without T at T.T. . . . and for free!!

O.K. Sam—you can come out'a that file cabinet, now!

P.S. Anybody got a copy of THE LOVERS???
—*63 Glenridge Ave. St. Catherines, Ont. Canada.*

Presumably, Joe, you have read straight down the letter column to this point instead of going directly to your own letter—no? Ah, well, we thought you might. Anyway, when you go back and read the other letters you may be surprised at the remarkable variation in response to TURNCOAT. We were. The interesting thing is that when we deliberately print a story to which we expect violent reaction, like NO LAND OF NOD, nothing happens. When we print something like TURNCOAT, which didn't seem to be such a taboo breaker, all kinds of things explode. Is that why insurance companies won't take editors?

Lee Priestly is a her, not a him.

TURNOVER TIME

by Ken Potts

Dear Mr. Mines: Last week I was sent a copy of your magazine THRILLING WONDER STORIES, December 1952. So I thought I'd sit myself down and write a short note to the editor (that's you).

I liked all the stories but won't discuss them at length as your own American fans seem more capable of judging whether they are good or bad and I'm sure they're all picked to pieces by now.

Out here in Australia, American stf is non-existent, what with dollar gaps, trade restrictions, etc., so we are starved for the best things in life (stf). Any American mag passes through many hands as soon as it gets here. I've had my copy one week and five people have read it already. Well, to get to a point: I am unable to get mags by normal means and am forced to sink to the low, despicable depths of asking anyone who has any old mags to let me have them. So long as they're legible I'll read them. If they haven't any mags,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I will answer all letters but prefer them from younger fans as I'm 19.

This letter will most likely never get published, but if it should be, would some kind fan let me know as I have very little chance of seeing it myself.

Sorry I can't write in the brilliant but mad style of most of your correspondents, but us English just ain't up to it.—*307 Douglas Parade, Newport, Melbourne, Australia.*

All right, gang, put him out of his misery.

JUST FOR LAUGHS

by Phyllis Grazer

Hey Sam: Just read THE READER SPEAKS. What's the matter with these fans who say a certain story is no good "but it's eminently readable!" Big joke; one, two, three—laugh!

February TWS was good, I really enjoyed myself. VIRGIN OF ZESH—okay. ASSIGNMENT TO ALDEBARAN was just swell. Really hated it when it ended. Read it twice though, so that was all right.

DARK NUPTIAL and UNRELIABLE PERFUMIST were pretty good. Would have thought the same of STAR OF WONDER, maybe, if I had understood the end better.

Read WONDER STORY ANNUAL too. Really liked your story FIND THE SCULPTOR though I think I would have liked it better had it ended where Hank said, "But who made the head?" It made my imagination work. I was stopped right there before I read the rest.

This is my first letter to you but you can expect many more.—*Rt. 1, Box 212W, Tillamook, Oregon.*

Seems to be a mass movement of housewives away from the home and garden type of literature towards science fiction. Seriously—letters from housewives saying in effect, "Where has this stuff been all my life?" are mushrooming. And the key is right up there in Mrs. Grazer's letter—it makes their imaginations work.

THE DIAPER SET

by Ron Ellik

. . . and, as the bem is about to swallow my girl friend, the robot is twisting my head off, and I have to strangle the mad scientist, I take time out to write this letter. (Well, after all, I had nothing better to do. . . .)

Re: The Aprish TWS.

Subtitle 1: The Letter Column.

Seems that NO LAND OF NOD created almost as much of a stir among the prudes and fen as THE LOVERS, huh? I didn't write about it as I did not feel quite well qualified to comment on it. I thought it was pretty darn good. I sure hope you don't think that I'm overstepping the natural bounds placed upon me by my age, Sam, as I think that we younger fen have just as much right to like a story of that sort as the grownups. Heck, one of the older fen said in this very ish, that he thought all fen were broadminded. If so, then I think that we have a right to be broadminded about things like that too, don't you? (Oh, boy, did I put Mines on the spot, yuk, yuk, gahhh, put down that knife, Sam, we're pals, remember?)

I'm betting with van Riper on the subject of letters about people not letting kids like me read such stuff as The Virgin, but frankly, I don't really appreciate the story. I think it's the part of Althea marrying the bem that got me. Never could stand that stuff. I didn't see anything any more, uhm, dangerous, to me than in THE LOVERS, though, and besides the ending I really enjoyed the story.

Subtitle 2: TURNCOAT.

(Here we notice a complete change of mood in the tone of the keys striking the paper.)

MINES! YOU FINALLY DID IT! (This is not in ecstasy as it looks, but in shock.) You finally printed a story which can not get out of having a sequel! Not for the worth of the story, as I thought it about a grade 'B', but for the fact that you left us in a place of indecision about the outcome of it. They's just gotta be a sequel. (Been arguing with a friend over this for days now. He says that there can't be a sequel. Not a very good friend, is he? Won't even let me impress my beliefs on him.) Knight left us where we don't know what's going to happen. We know he will go on to College and become a higher-up in the future world, but we don't know exactly how this business of reconquering the civilizations will come about. Please tell us when the sequel will appear. It is already fixed in my mind (?) that there will be a sequel.

Sam, it seems to me that you have neglected a very important item to stfen. This new Science-Fiction Book of the Month Club, I mean. It may not be very new, but aSF ran a back cover ad on it, and I thought you'd at least get around to mentioning it.—*232 Santa Ana, Long Beach 3, Calif.*

Sequel to TURNCOAT? Hadn't thought about it, but maybe Damon Knight has. You're one of those quiz kids who want answers to everything, aren't you? When you're as old and battered as we are you'll come around to the conclusion that there are blamed few answers to anything anyway, so you won't be continually expecting sequels. As for the problem of young readers and mature stories—seems to us that age is mental rather than chronological and if you can't understand a story you won't like it and that takes care of that. Like your postscript which got clipped off that you didn't like OASIS. Wasn't a question of sex or anything in that story—it was an appeal to a mood which is yet outside your experience, so you didn't like it. People who have been through a similar type of experience have responded strongly to it. Which only indicates, I suppose that you cannot really visualize anything completely new—you can only synthesize *apparently* new images from fragments of familiar things in a new arrangement.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE RIGHT MOOD
by Val Walker

Dear Ed: I just can't decide whether I like MOTHER or not. One minute I think I like it then. . . . I don't know it leaves such a hell'uv a taste in my mouth.

That guy couldn't really have been human if he didn't want to be free, and I personally can't see how anyone could just set in one room for day after day after day, etc.

Then on the other hand I guess I could've missed the whole point . . . it being I suppose that this was the warmth and kindness and peace man is forever seeking. I dunno. Guess I didn't read it in the right mood.

Didn't care for the cover a lot, it stunk as a matter of fact.

TURNCOAT was a good short novel, very fine. If it wasn't for fear of the fans jumping down my throat and sending me bombs and the like I would say it was better than the Farmer story. It isn't that I have anything morally against the yarn, it just struck me wrong!

Seriously Sam, TWS just doesn't seem to stack up to SS. Don't get me wrong, TWS has some fine stories and is better than most mags in the field, but I feel that SS is decidedly better. It couldn't be the longer stories because I like short stories just as well. Sometimes I haven't the time to read the long ones.

Couple free ads: (I hope)

Get on the Bandwagon take a look at Singing Space. Stories, articles, cartoons, poems and what have you. A two color cover—with professional art work. 15¢ for a single copy 1.50 for a year. 10¢ sample copy. Anyone having any mags with the Toffee stories by Charles F. Myers drop me a line if they want to tell them.—*6438 E. 4th Pl., Tulsa, Okla.*

S'funny how we sometimes get letters addressed to TWS saying they think SS is better and letters addressed to SS saying they think

[*Turn page*]

THE PHILCON

The 11th World Science Fiction Convention—the event of the year. Names in the science fiction world. Visitors from every country on the globe. Where?

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Bellevue Stratford Hotel.

When?

Labor Day Weekend. September 5th, 6th and 7th, to be exact, 1953.

How?

Write 11th World S-F Convention, P.O. Box 2019, Philadelphia, 3, Pa., for information. Send $1 if you want a membership now, which will entitle you to bulletins of progress.

What's doing? Banquet, costume ball, editors, pro writers, fans to meet. Guest of honor, Willy Ley.

If it is anything like the Chicon, it'll be fun.

He Asked Permission to Stay

Major William E. Barber, USMC

EIGHT THOUSAND marines lay besieged at Yudam-ni; three thousand more were at Hagaru-ri, preparing a breakthrough. Guarding a frozen mountain pass between them, Major Barber, with only a company, held their fate in his hands. Encirclement threatened him. But he asked permission to stay, and for five days he held the pass against attack. When relief came, only eighty-four men could walk away. But Major Barber had saved a division.

"I know," says Major Barber, "that you realize what hard jobs our men are doing in America's armed forces. Maybe you *haven't* realized that you're *helping* those men — whenever you invest in Defense Bonds. For Bonds strengthen our economy — to produce the arms and food and care that make our men secure."

Peace is for the strong! For peace and prosperity save with U.S. Defense Bonds!

Now E Bonds pay 3%! Now, improved Series E Bonds start paying interest after 6 months. And average 3% interest, compounded semiannually when held to maturity! Also, all *maturing* E Bonds automatically *go on* earning—at the new rate—for 10 *more* years. Today, start investing in U. S. Series E Defense Bonds through the Payroll Savings Plan at work.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured," and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write:
CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 33, Bloomfield, New Jersey

TOWELS

12 Large Size Assorted Colors ONLY $1.00

Money Back Guarantee, Order Now!
MURRAY HILL HOUSE, Dept. 2PJ
©MHH 157 East 31st St., New York 16, N. Y.
Dealers' Inquiries Invited

EAR ACHE?

DENT'S

EAR WAX DROPS for fast temporary relief of accumulated wax condition
TOOTHACHE?
ask your druggist for DENT'S TOOTH GUM, TOOTH DROPS or POULTICE

Be a DETECTIVE

A CHALLENGE FROM WASHINGTON, D. C. Help Stop Crime! Train at home. Earn big money. Amazing training course from the NATION'S CAPITOL (center of law enforcement) by former U. S. GOVT. AGENT and NAVAL INTELLIGENCE Officer exposes actual methods used by Criminals. Write for FREE BOOK. State age.

INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE SYSTEM

INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE TRAINING SCHOOL
1701 Monroe St., N. E. Dept. TG-38 Washington 18, D. C.

STOP TOBACCO

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write Today for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved over 300,000 people.
In Business Since 1909
THE NEWELL COMPANY
153 Clayton Sta. St. Louis 5, Mo.
FREE BOOK

High School Course at Home

Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.
AMERICAN SCHOOL, Dept. HC-58, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a FREE trial of the FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing.

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO. 770-T FRONTIER BLDG.
462 NIAGARA ST. BUFFALO 1, N. Y.

TWS is better. Could it be we are being spoofed? Actually, apart from differences in word length we think of the twins as having the same standards and we don't keep the best stories for one or the other. Can't quarrel too badly with your taste under the circumstances.

Sign off time now—there's a letter from Anthony Sebastian of 8415 San Antonio Ave., South Gate, Cal., who likes not only TWS but WONDER STORY ANNUAL; from Roy Morser, OMU p.o. Box 915, Patrick Air Force Base, Florida, who offers a list of back numbers for sale; from Dick Jenssen, 34 Anderson St., 8th-Yarra, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, who sends us a copy of a new fanmag titled PERHAPS and makes a desperate plea for contributions for it—stories, poems, articles—anything, even from editorial us.

There's a wail from Judy Sanow, 6326 Lindenhurst, Los Angeles who says she cannot find in her heart to believe that Pogo is the only comic book we ever bought, a growl from Charles Lewis, P.O. Box 891, Denver 1, Colorado who wants to know why we choked off the theological war just when it was getting good, and one from Charles Wells, 405 East 62nd Street, Savannah, Georgia, who doesn't have any important gripes but wants to know if we're letting the pros capture the letter column, what with Clark, Pratt, Bester, Sturgeon Crossen et al. Don't be bigoted, boy, give the pros a chance to get some things off their chests. They've got chests, haven't they?

—The Editor

Answers to Quiz on page 69

1-d, 2-j, 3-f, 4-h, 5-a, 6-i, 7-e, 8-c, 9-g, 10-b.

When You Visit Your Favorite Newsstand, Look for the Slogan

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

ON THE COVERS OF THE MAGAZINES YOU BUY!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW

THE SPACE MERCHANTS by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth, Ballantine Books, Inc., New York, $1.50.

GRAVY PLANET, with a change of name, makes Ballantine's second science fiction venture into the new low-priced hard cover book field. The story is hard-boiled social satire, with the original title describing it more fluently than the new. Earth and all the other earths yet to be discovered, are indeed "gravy planets" for the exploiters.

The theme is that of free enterprise, even the police. The result is that society depends much less upon strict interpretation of law than

upon various gentlemen's agreements and codes.

Feuding for example, is recognized, but the participants must serve formal notice upon each other and unauthorized feuds, or bushwhacking, is frowned upon as conduct unbecoming a gentleman. This is a world of the future in which familiar elements persist, yet the camera angle is strange and disturbing.

The emphasis has been shifted to annoy. For example, petroleum is a thing of the past. If you want a cab you can get a Cadillac, but the charge depends upon whether it is propelled by one man or three—the ultimate in swank being a three man job. Also since wood has vanished, a solid oak ring is far more expensive than a fine diamond.

Done in brittle, but fluent, fast-paced style it makes swift reading. You may enjoy it or be irritated by the exaggeration, but it is an important trend in science fiction, somewhat on the order of THE DEMOLISHED MAN. It isn't, fortunately, the only type of science fiction, any more than the private eye story is the only type of detective fiction, but similarly, it is both clever and readable.

I'LL GIVE YOU THESE AUTO SEAT COVERS AS A BONUS

And Pay You Well Besides If You Will Show Them And Take Orders from Car Owners In Spare Time Only!

Want extra money—plenty of it day after day? Then rush your name and address at once for Free Sample Outfit that will start you taking orders from car owners everywhere for Key expertly tailored Auto Seat Covers. EXCLUSIVE NEW PATTERNS to fit every make and model car. No one can compete with you, in wide choice in quality—and in expert tailoring that makes covers fit like a pair of gloves—and when you quote prices that are only a fraction of what the customer expects to pay, brother! You make money hand over fist writing up the fast orders! Line includes nationally advertised sensations like BLACK EBONY Saran, beautiful BAMBOO, brilliant FIESTA, colorful BULL FIGHTER PLAIDS, plus many other exclusive patterns to choose from, all at unbelievably low prices.

RUSH NAME FOR FREE OUTFIT

Give MAKE, YEAR and MODEL of YOUR CAR

No experience needed. Make all the extra money you need easily just by showing! Every car owner a "hot" prospect. YEAR AROUND STEADY PROFITS. No investment to make. Actual seat covers given to producers as a bonus for OWN USE! Write for Free Selling Kit valued at $2.00 and actual samples TODAY!

KEY PRODUCTS CORP.
800 N. Clark St., Dept. 34-O, Chicago 10, Ill.

If You Want to Stop Smoking

try NO-TO-BAC Lozenges. See how the aromatic flavor of NO-TO-BAC helps you give up the craving for tobacco. Rush $1 to NO-TO-BAC for 7 days' supply. (For heavy smokers—16 days' supply—$2.) Money refunded if not satisfied. Write: NO-TO-BAC, Dept. S, Stamford, Conn.

ACCOUNTANT

BECOME AN EXPERT

Executive Accountants and C. P. A's earn $4,000 to $10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. We train you thoroly at home in spare time for C. P. A's examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C. P. A's. Placement counsel and help. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays."

LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 6329H, Chicago 5, Ill.

LEARN AT HOME

- to be a Nurse's Aide
- Practical Nurse
- or Infant Nurse

Prepare in spare time for a fascinating, high-pay career. Thousands of men and women, 18-60, are graduates of this physician-endorsed course. High school not required. Easy payments; earn as you learn. Trial plan. 54th year.

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING
Dept. 428, 41 East Pearson Street, Chicago 11, Ill.
Please send me free booklet and 16 sample lesson pages.

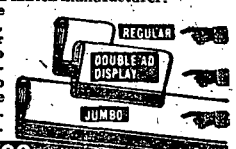
Name _____
City _____ *State* _____ *Age* _____

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAKE EXTRA MONEY

EVERY BUSINESS EVERYWHERE USES UNION LABEL BOOK MATCHES

No experience needed to earn big daily commissions. Be a direct factory representative of the world's largest exclusive UNION LABEL Book Match manufacturer. Prospects everywhere. Feature Glamour Girls, Hillbillies, scenics and dozens of other styles—Double Books—Jumbo Books—nearly 100 color combinations. New, bigger portfolio makes this fastest selling line a real profit maker for you. Write TODAY for full details.



SUPERIOR MATCH CO.
Dept. R-853, 7528 S. Greenwood Ave., Chicago 19, Illinois
West Coast Salesmen, write Box 1087, San Jose, Calif.

LAW . . .

STUDY AT HOME Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before.

More Ability: More Prestige: More Money We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send NOW.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, 417 South Dearborn Street
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 8329L, Chicago 5, Ill.

END TOBACCO CRAVING

New Scientific RID-O-BAC Tablets offer real help to anyone who seriously wants to give up tobacco. Helps relieve craving for tobacco in any form—Cigarettes, Cigars, Pipe, Chewing, etc. Easy to take. Absolutely harmless: Try the New Better way thousands are now using. Rush $2.00 for generous supply with Positive Money Back Guarantee!

RID-O-BAC—Dept. TF
P.O. Box 14706 Cimarron Sta. Los Angeles 18, Calif.

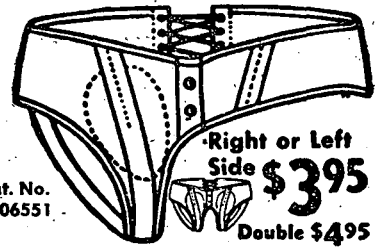
NEW TOWELS

LARGE SIZE ASSORTED COLORS 12 for $1.00
NEW! Not Seconds
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE
Order NOW—Supply Limited
Agents Wanted — Make Big Money
TOWEL SHOP
Dept. 678 Box 881 St. Louis, Mo.

AMAZING COMFORT — NO FITTING REQUIRED WITH PATENTED

RUPTURE-EASER

T.M. Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. (A Piper Brace Product)
For MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN



Pat. No. 2606551

Right or Left Side $3.95
Double $4.95

A strong, form fitting washable support. Back lacing adjustable. Snaps up in front. Adjustable leg strap. Soft, flat groin pad. No steel or leather bands. Unexcelled for comfort. Also used as after operation support. Mail orders give measure around the lowest part of the abdomen and state right or left side or double. We Prepay Postage Except on C.O.D.'s.

Over 500,000 Grateful Users! **10 Day Trial Offer**
Money-back guarantee if you don't get blessed relief
Delay may be serious — ORDER TODAY!
PIPER BRACE CO.
811 Wyandotte Dept. TF-83 Kansas City 5, Mo.

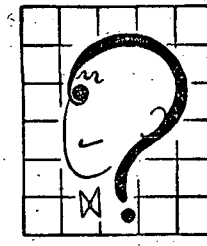
THE DEMOLISHED MAN by Alfred Bester, Shasta Publishers, Chicago, 250 pages, $3.00.

The much-talked about magazine serial of last year achieves hard cover status with an equivalent fanfare. It is a story of murder—murder in the 24th Century when the police were telepaths and the ordinary criminal had as much chance of hiding anything from them as he had of getting an ice-cream concession on the Sun. Nevertheless, a bold and desperate man dared murder and defied the "esper" police to track him down, read his mind or outmaneuver him.

Brittle, brilliant, forceful, this is the ultimate in the hardboiled private eye type of story, combining as it does the two worlds of detection and science fiction. Mr. Bester is a monstrously clever fellow and his method is to dazzle and overwhelm the reader by the sheer pyrotechnics of his style. There is a three-ring circus going on at all times with the reader's senses assailed by the volume and color flung at him so prolifically.

It would be easy to hail this as a great novel, which it is not, or to dismiss it as a tour de force, which it also is not. For although it is hard, glittering, forced, there is something about Mr. Bester's cleverness which makes us think he could penetrate far more deeply than this if he cared to and that some day he will combine wit and heart to everyone's benefit.

If You Like Quizzes, Word Games and Puzzles--



YOUR BEST BETS ARE

POPULAR CROSSWORD PUZZLES
BEST CROSSWORD PUZZLES
VARIETY CROSSWORD PUZZLES
NEW CROSSWORD PUZZLES

Now on Sale at All Stands!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yes! Any 3 OF THESE Top Science-Fiction Thrillers Yours for Only $1.00

—Continued from Back Cover

TAKEOFF — (See description on back cover.)

OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE FICTION — 43 top stories by outstanding authors . . . stories of Wonders of Earth and Man . . . of startling inventions . . . of visitors from Outer Space . . . of Far Traveling . . . Adventure in Dimension . . . Worlds of Tomorrow. 562 pages.

SANDS OF MARS — You're the first Earth-Man to rocket-crash onto the wild Martian desert — the first to track down the strange footprints and find yourself face-to-face with — A MARTIAN!

THE CURRENTS OF SPACE — 500 million people on the planet Florina will DIE . . . unless they are warned in time. Only one man can save them . . . and HE must first grow a new memory!

WEST OF THE SUN — Robinson Crusoe had it easy! This shipwrecked crew of 21st Century scientists is marooned on an unknown planet **billions of miles from earth!**

DOUBLE JEOPARDY — Two beautiful women — one born of man and frightened of love . . . the other made by man and eager for love . . . PLUS a killer who can kill in TWO places **at the same time!**

The Book Club of Tomorrow Is Here TODAY!

THE FOUNDING of the SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB is a recognition of the fact that Science-Fiction is an important **new kind** of literature for imaginative readers. Science-Fiction has grown so fast it's hard to keep up with it!

Now — The Cream of New Science-Fiction Books — For Only $1 Each!

To enable you to ENJOY the finest without worrying about the cost, the Club has arranged to bring you the best brand-new full-length books FOR ONLY $1 EACH (plus a few cents shipping charge) — even though they cost $2.50, $2.75 and up in publishers' editions! Each month's selection is described IN ADVANCE, in the Club's free bulletin, "Things to Come." You take ONLY those books you want — as few as four a year, if you wish.

SEND NO MONEY — Just Mail Postcard

On this special introductory offer, you may have your choice of ANY 3 of these new Science-Fiction masterpieces — AT ONLY $1 FOR ALL THREE. Two are your gift books for joining; the other is your first selection. This liberal offer may have to be withdrawn at any time. So mail postcard RIGHT NOW to: **SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB, Dept. TFG-8, Garden City, New York.**

WHICH 3 DO YOU WANT FOR ONLY $1.00?

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB
Dept. TFG-8, Garden City, New York

Please rush me the 3 books I have checked below, as my gift books and first selection. You will bill me only $1 (plus few cents shipping charges) for all three and enroll me as a member of the Science-Fiction Book Club. Every month send me the Club's free bulletin, "Things to Come," so that I may decide whether or not I wish to receive the coming monthly selection described therein. For each book I accept, I will pay only $1 plus a few cents shipping charge. I do not have to take a book every month (only four during each year I am a member) — and I may resign at any time after accepting four selections.

SPECIAL NO-RISK GUARANTEE: If not delighted, I may return all books in 7 days, pay nothing, and this membership will be cancelled!

☐ **CURRENTS OF SPACE** ☐ **OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE FICTION** ☐ **TAKEOFF**
☐ **DOUBLE JEOPARDY** ☐ **SANDS OF MARS** ☐ **WEST OF THE SUN**

Name ..... (Please Print)

Address .....

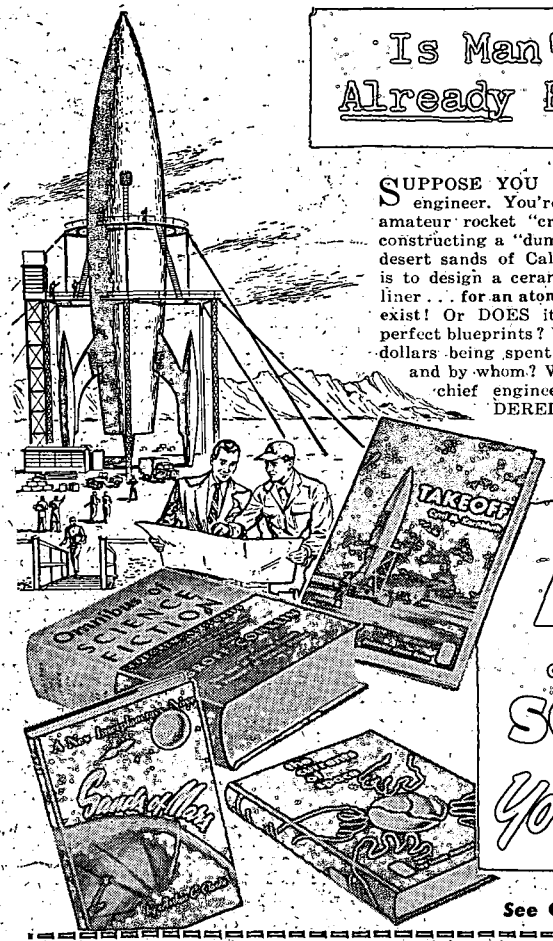
City ..... Zone ..... State .....

Selection Price in Canada $1.10 plus shipping. Address 105 Bond St., Toronto 2. (Offer Good Only in U.S. and Canada)

MAIL POSTCARD AT ONCE • NO POSTAGE NEEDED

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Is Man's First Space Ship Already Being Secretly Built?



SUPPOSE YOU were Mike Novik, engineer. You're HIRED by some amateur rocket "crackpots," who are constructing a "dummy" rocket on the desert sands of California. YOUR job is to design a ceramic exhaust throat-liner . . . for an atomic fuel that doesn't exist! Or DOES it? Then why such perfect blueprints? Why are millions of dollars being spent on the project — and by whom? Why is the project's chief engineer suddenly MURDERED?

Your suspicions can no longer be stifled. **This rocket is no dummy — and neither is the master brain behind it!**

You'll thrill to every page of this daring Science-Fiction novel, "TAKE-OFF." It is just ONE of the exciting books offered to new members of the SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB. Read about the others on the other side . . . then PICK ANY THREE FOR ONLY $1 on this great offer!

ANY 3

of these Complete New Masterpieces of

SCIENCE-FICTION

Yours for Only $1.00 with membership

See Other Side For Full Details

FIRST CLASS
Permit No. 3
(Sec. 34.9 P. L. & R.)
Garden City, N. Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD
No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

4c POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB, *Dept. TFG-8,*

GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED